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the 1990s, the number of people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia has increased in the United Kingdom (Meltzer and Peck 1998).

There is a growing awareness of the need to improve the lives of people with mental health problems, and the importance of the role of the community in this. The United Kingdom has a long history of institutional care, and the development of the community mental health services has been a gradual process. The 1983 Mental Health Act was a landmark in the development of community mental health services, and the 1990s have seen a rapid expansion of these services. The 1990s have also seen a growing awareness of the need to improve the lives of people with mental health problems, and the importance of the role of the community in this. The 1990s have seen a rapid expansion of these services, and the 1990s have also seen a growing awareness of the need to improve the lives of people with mental health problems, and the importance of the role of the community in this.

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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has also become a major employer of women. In 1980, women made up 40% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 50%. This increase in the number of women in the public sector has been a key factor in the overall increase in the number of women in the workforce. The public sector has also become a major employer of young people. In 1980, young people made up 10% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 20%.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people with disabilities. In 1980, people with disabilities made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%. This increase in the number of people with disabilities in the public sector has been a key factor in the overall increase in the number of people with disabilities in the workforce. The public sector has also become a major employer of people from ethnic minorities. In 1980, people from ethnic minorities made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are over 50 years old. In 1980, people over 50 years old made up 10% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 20%. This increase in the number of people over 50 years old in the public sector has been a key factor in the overall increase in the number of people over 50 years old in the workforce. The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are under 20 years old. In 1980, people under 20 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are over 65 years old. In 1980, people over 65 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%. This increase in the number of people over 65 years old in the public sector has been a key factor in the overall increase in the number of people over 65 years old in the workforce. The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are under 16 years old. In 1980, people under 16 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are over 75 years old. In 1980, people over 75 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%. This increase in the number of people over 75 years old in the public sector has been a key factor in the overall increase in the number of people over 75 years old in the workforce. The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are under 12 years old. In 1980, people under 12 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%.

The public sector has also become a major employer of people who are over 85 years old. In 1980, people over 85 years old made up 5% of the public sector workforce, and by 1995, this figure had risen to 10%.



HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

VOL. II.



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HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

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HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

BY

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND,

AUTHOR OF

"MRS. BLAKE," "THE DIAMOND WEDDING,"

&c. &c.

Commend me to home joy—the family board
Altar and hearth! These with a brisk career
A source of honest profit and good fame,
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honouring God and serving man—I say
These are reality, and all else—fluff,
Nutshell, and naught.

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HUBERT FREETH'S PROSPERITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN'S PARTY.

Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport
Like linnets in the bush,
Ye little know the ills ye court
When manhood is your wish.

BURNS.

THE long-expected second of January was come—a cold, dull day, with a keen east wind. But within-doors everything looked cheerful at Telford House. A bright fire blazed in nearly every room, and the Christmas decorations of evergreens and holly were abundant and tasteful; servants were busy going to and fro, making the needful preparations for the evening; and light feet pattered about as the

young folks alternately helped, hindered, or admired. Even "papa" had given up his study for the occasion, and there the Christmas-tree was placed.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and Catherine, in her dark merino morning-dress, was making final adjustments of the tree, her sister Jane handing her the toys and nick-nacks not yet suspended. The green pyramidal tree, the many-coloured candles and varied offerings, with a background of richly-filled book-shelves, and the two graceful girls, made a pretty picture; and so thought the two gentlemen who rather suddenly entered the room. These were Hubert Freeth and Algernon Raybrooke.

Algernon had been again "worried" by his constituents about their local affairs, and was now endeavouring to recover lost popularity by interesting himself in their behalf. He had been advised to apply to Mr. Freeth as the man, of all others, who could give him the necessary information concerning some hydraulic works about which certain corporate bodies were squabbling; and he thought, having met him at Lady

Hartrington's was sufficient apology for calling on him at his office on a matter of business.

Of course it was. And though Mr. Freeth only just remembered him as a "gentlemanlike young man who sat next Catherine," he was courteous and kind, and gave him considerable information and excellent advice. But some plans, which were necessary to simplify his statements, happened to be at home; and, as he was leaving the office early in honour of the children's gala, what more natural than to ask Mr. Raybrooke to come round and see them, the distance not being five minutes' walk?

"Catherine," exclaimed the father, as he entered, "you remember Mr. Raybrooke? We had the pleasure of meeting him at Lady Hartrington's in the Autumn."

Catherine bowed, held out her hand, uttered some ordinary phrase of greeting; and though her heart had made a wild leap at the recognition of the visitor, she was sufficiently schooled not to betray emotion.

Algernon Raybrooke was only a little less surprised at the meeting. Perhaps he was aware that a sort of fascination he did not

trouble himself to resist, had strengthened his inclination to consult Mr. Freeth, and he had gladly accompanied him to his home, but he had not dared to hope that he should see any of the ladies of the family to-day, whatever future opportunities might arise for so doing.

"I forgot that I had abdicated my right here for to-day," said Mr. Freeth, with a laugh, "but I think I can lay my hand on what I want in a moment. Yes, here are the Fenfield drawings," he continued, lifting down a portfolio from a high shelf. "I will move the table nearer the window; or shall we light the gas at once?"

"Oh, I can see perfectly well," replied Algernon, "but I fear I am a sad intruder. I believe I like play better than work. I am sure I would rather be assisting the young ladies than poring over engineering plans."

"They are the simplest things in the world," returned Mr. Freeth, who was a man that, on the whole, liked work better than play, and took Algernon's speech for a mere young man's politeness. But Catherine was glad that the visitor was obliged to give his attention to the plans, and she hurried the last decorations of the

tree, and slipped out of the room as soon as she could. A weight was at her heart—a dark terror of unknown evil oppressed her. And, above all, a self-scorn that she who, in three days, was to be Reuben's wife, could be so moved by this man's presence. It was as if a buried corpse stirred in its grave.

Hester Otway had dined with the younger children at one o'clock, but the family dinner—in anticipation of the early party—was to be in half an hour, and Catherine determined to let the bell ring on, and not go downstairs till everyone must have assembled—not till Raybrooke must have departed, so that there should not even be a chance encounter on the stairs. Alas! for such good intentions and their fulfilment! She found the family at table, as she expected, but, instead of the guest having departed, he had been asked to stay, so that some memoranda he wished to make might be taken after dinner. Even the seat he occupied was next the one reserved for Catherine! Could they help remembering how, once before, they had thus sat side by side?

The Freeths were all thoroughly unaffected,

sociable people. Lionel had, within this hour, returned from a three days' visit to a college friend, and was in high spirits, prepared to make himself useful and agreeable. Moreover, he had previously announced that he had met Cuthbert Rawlins, and had invited him for the evening; he was such a capital fellow, and would make all sorts of fun for the children; but he thought his mother had better send him a note of invitation, which, accordingly, she had done. What, therefore, more natural than that another young man, thus fallen among them accidentally, should be asked to join the evening party?

From the depths of her heart Catherine hoped that Algernon would say "No,"—hoped there was really some imperative engagement he could not break. But the "No" was a very faint one, the engagement he had, only a promise to be at home to receive his brother, an engagement at once superseded by the suggestion that he should bring the young midshipman with him. Decidedly the party was taking proportions not expected in the morning.

Now, there is no sort of friendly gathering—

not even a picnic—less apt to be formal and ceremonious than a juvenile Christmas party, with a fair sprinkling of “grown-up young people” amidst it. Where the elderly young pretend to be children, and the children strive to be men and women; where the budding vanities are without malice, and fresh young faces wear no masks; where ringing laughter is clear as a wild bird’s song, and mirth is not tangled with sorrow. Let the cynic be silent in such a scene, or whisper his forebodings, at any rate, with bated breath. We know the old, old story, the stern, sad truth. We know how these young hearts are skirting the whirlpool of life; how soon they must be caught in its eddies, some to swim and some to sink, but all to wrestle and suffer. Yet none the less may we rejoice when clear young voices rise about us as if to purify the air, and strike a joyous keynote with their childish treble. People feel influences without reasoning about them.

Between seven and eight o’clock the dancing began—the Twelfth Night characters having already been drawn, and a small cavalier of eight years old and a little damsel of ten in-

stalled king and queen for the evening. Catherine had determined to chase thought by busy activity, and she flitted about the rooms, a presiding genius of the scene. She wore a simple white dress, with large, long, hanging sleeves, which, looped up at the shoulder with coral bands, sometimes shrouded and sometimes left bare her round white arms. Also the masses of her dark hair were sustained by pins of carved coral. The two younger girls, with their fluttering ribbons and crisply-curled hair, looked far more dressed and decorated.

Cuthbert Rawlins had arrived by eight o'clock, and was being caressed and fêted by all the family; for was he not Lionel's dear friend, and the gallant swimmer who had rescued him at the peril of his own life? Cuthbert Rawlins was good-looking and well-bred, with the ease and suavity of manner only acquired by contact with good society in the early and impressionable days of youth. Catherine had been asked by her brother to string the name of Cuthbert on the rosary of her friends, and she had tried to do so while he was yet unknown, and notwithstanding the painful association with which

the request was connected. Yet now, when they met, a strange recoil and vague sense of disappointment came over her; while she was ashamed of herself for feeling an ungrateful, unreasonable dislike. Everyone else considered him the life of the party. He made fun for the children—not boisterously, but with a subtle spice of comicality, sang “Le Postillon” with the genuine “crack,” which delighted the little people; was ready to dance with the smallest personage in the room; but finally attached himself to Phoebe as her devoted swain, she being sixteen, he not quite one-and-twenty.

Algernon Raybrooke also arrived in good time, with his brother the midshipman, who came in uniform, and was a fine specimen of the young naval officer. And these were the only “grown up” gentlemen of the party. Mr. Freeth looked into the room three or four times during the course of the evening, spoke to the children he knew, but the whole thing was out of his line, and he found out some quiet corner of the house, where he occupied an hour or two in writing letters.

Mrs. Freeth was on hospitable cares intent,

excited by the occasion, had chatted away freely and familiarly.

"Oh, it has been such a jolly Christmas," he exclaimed, "lots of parties and lots of fun; and I'll tell you something that, perhaps, you don't know. We are going to have a wedding on Saturday."

"A wedding," replied Algernon, conscious that the word sounded like a knell, but master enough of himself to suppress all show of emotion. "A wedding! and pray which is the bride?"

"Why, Catherine, to be sure; the others are children."

"And the fortunate bridegroom?" asked Algernon, glancing round the room, "which is he?"

"Oh, Reuben is not here; he will not be in town till to-morrow night. Would you like to dance with Catherine? She said she would not dance at all, but I dare say she'll give way if I ask her. Would you like her for a partner? We shall want you again, I am certain. Which do you like best, the Lancers or the Schottische?"

•

Do say. I declare you have not got a card of the dances. What a shame !”

“Oh, never mind the card,” replied Raybrooke. “I shall be able to remember my engagements. And, indeed, I will accept your good offices with your sister, and shall be very glad if you can persuade her to alter her resolution.”

“Oh, come along. There she is, in the other room.”

Algernon followed the small master of the ceremonies, glad to be led by the boy's pertinacity.

“Now, Kate, I have brought you a partner,” exclaimed Gilbert ; “and you *must* stand up.”

“I thought the grown-up ladies were not to dance, Gilbert,” said Catherine, but meeting Algernon's glance even as she spoke.

“Oh, that is all nonsense, if you are wanted. Why, Miss Otway has danced ; why should not you ?”

“I am not sure that we are wanted this time,” observed Algernon. “Perhaps Miss Freeth will allow me to chat with her while you dance.”

"Very well, then," returned Gilbert; "but I must be off, for I am engaged for the next five dances."

The next minute the musicians struck up a lively quadrille, and Kate and Algernon became, as it were, imprisoned on one side of the room.

They talked, but it was not about dancing and music, or children's balls, or on any theme suggested by the frolic and gaiety around them. Algernon spoke of their former meeting at Lady Hartington's,—spoke as if he at least remembered well all the small incidents of that evening; indeed, he might almost be said to resume the thread of conversation broken by the announcement of Mr. Freeth's carriage.

There was a subtle flattery in this proof of his vivid recollections. Though Algernon Raybrooke never meant it for anything of the sort. He only gave himself up to the fascination and intoxication of the hour, not heeding whither it was leading him.

Catherine also was entranced. Oh, why did this man again cross her path, to make her dis-

contented with the lot that to all the world seemed fair and bright? Or looking, speaking thus, why had he not come to claim her the very day after they had first met? It was too late now, for Catherine had learnt who Raybrooke was—how bright was his opening career, how fair were his prospects; and to her these truths were but new links to bind her to her cousin. Had Algernon been poor, and had he said that night, "I love you, Catherine," she might still have been his.

And now the children were going downstairs to draw for prizes from the Christmas-tree. Algernon offered Catherine his arm. What could she do but take it? Soon the library was full of laughing, chattering children, and Mrs. Freeth, who dispensed the prizes, was too intent on her task to much regard the doings of the elder visitors. Children, from time to time, made their way to Catherine to show her their treasures, but even those already enriched lingered about the fascinating tree. Thus it came to pass that the drawing-rooms were nearly deserted. Frank Raybrooke and Jane Freeth had, however, returned thither, and Jane was

at the piano, with the young midshipman by her side, when Algernon and Catherine re-entered the room,

Jane was playing from memory, first one sprightly air and then another, as if at Frank's bidding; and, finally, the notes burst into a popular waltz-tune, which she executed with no common dash and spirit. Half a dozen juvenile couples, yielding to the exhilaration of the music, were wheeling round the room. Cuthbert Rawlins had persuaded Phoebe to be his partner, and Lionel, who was a "beautiful waltzer," had drawn Hester Otway into the whirl. Was the music really inspiring, or the waltz-fever contagious? Without a word spoken, but with manner more beseeching than any words, Algernon passed his arm round Catherine's waist, and in another minute they, too, were under the subtle fascination of the dance.

But the spell was quickly broken. Catherine was no prude. Never before had she felt shame or wrong in the waltz, but some instinct of self-respect to-night cried loudly in her ear to desist, and hardly had they whirled twice round the room when she paused and insisted on sit-

ting down. As she did so, she looked across the room, and met the earnest gaze of Janet Gillespie. The old nurse, with Burton and one or two other upper servants, was watching the youthful dancers from the doorway. In a minute they had to make way for the musicians, who were returning from taking refreshments ; and, as there was to be more dancing before supper, Jane's playing ceased, and they resumed their duties.

For the remainder of the evening, Catherine busied herself to the utmost of her ability with the amusements of the children ; but she made strange blunders, calling them by their wrong names, and by no means sustained the reputation her father had awarded her for ready tact and the skilful employment of resources.

Meanwhile, Algernon again found himself by Hester's side. Cautiously, and yet at last very boldly, he spoke of Catherine, her beauty, her grace ; and, *apropos* of the approaching marriage, asked questions about Reuben Appersley.

"Is he young?" inquired Raybrooke.

"Oh, yes," replied Hester ; "only about four and twenty."

"And handsome?"

"Very."

"A life-long attachment, I suppose?"

"I suppose so."

"Every way suitable, I imagine?"

"Ye-es."

"Is the man worthy of such a girl?"

"Oh, yes, yes, he is good and clever, and worthy of a noble woman for his wife."

Algernon looked at Hester as he spoke, and observed that her usual paleness had given way to a blush which flushed to her forehead, and even tinted her throat. He read her secret, but without knowledge, without comprehension of details, therefore it was wrapped in a haze of falsities. Yet he felt a strange pity, a real sympathy—a something which made him feel there was a link ready forged between him and Hester Otway.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER THE PARTY.—THE WEDDING.

With bridal morn most stories end,
 While mine, as yet, hath scarce begun,
 Yet 'tis not oft, in real life,
 That then with sorrow man has done.

LADY CHATTERTON.

BY degrees the children departed. Some tired and sleepy, fairly worn out with dancing, fun, and frolic; others with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, still wide awake with the wakefulness of excitement, which would show its revenge in languor and pallor to-morrow. Truly, a children's party is a curious microcosm, which a sage might profitably study.

Nor did the elder guests tarry late. It was

hardly midnight when the family separated for rest. Catherine found her bed-room door ajar, and heard, before she reached it, a faint rustling of silk. Janet Gillespie was wearing, newly on to-day, Mrs. Appersley's present, and looked very much the "gentlewoman" in the rich black silk dress. But it was no part of her duty to be in attendance, and Catherine almost rebuked her for sitting up so late.

"But I took upon myself to send Burton to bed," she replied; "and, oh, my dear, you must not grudge me the few opportunities that remain of my being with you."

A quiet kiss was Catherine's reply. And then the young girl seated herself in an easy chair, and lazily and mechanically unfastened her sash, and took the coral pins from her hair. Presently she looked up and met the earnest gaze of the old nurse, with just the same mournful and surprised expression which she had encountered an hour before.

"Janet, why do you look at me in that manner?" exclaimed Catherine, in a tone of anger, so ill and so faintly assumed that it did not deceive the poor woman for a moment.

"My darling, you are not happy!" she replied, and, as she spoke, she sank on her knees by Catherine's side, and wound her arms round her.

"Not happy! Why should I not be happy?" And now it was only a tone of surprise that was "ill and faintly assumed."

"Ah, why not?"

There was a pause, which Catherine broke by exclaiming, "Janet, what is it you mean? What have I done, what have I said, to give you these fancies?"

"You have done nothing, said nothing, my darling, and yet I know."

"Know what?"

"I know that you are unhappy." By this time they were both shedding quiet, noiseless tears, and Janet added, as she drew Catherine closer to her, folding her in the arms which had cradled her infancy, and speaking in a whisper, "Break off the marriage."

"No, Janet, no."

"I say yes; there is time still—those papers, the settlements, are not signed yet."

"There is not time. I must meet my destiny."

"You are resolved?"

"Quite."

"My poor child!"

"Janet," continued Catherine, after awhile, but without raising her head from the nurse's shoulder, "how is it you have been able to look into my heart, and see the dreadful secret that is hidden there?"

"Because in my own youth I loved passionately and suffered bitterly."

"And you do not despise me?"

"I only pity."

"But, Janet, you were happy in your marriage, happy in your love—"

"No; the daughter's disobedience recoiled on herself and brought agonies of remorse. There is no happiness out of the narrow path of duty."

"It is my duty, surely, to marry Reuben; to keep my promise to one who is himself all truth."

"Not if you do not love him; not—I must say it—not if you prefer another."

"Oh, Janet, your words scorch me. I will not own even to you that this is truth."

"Own it now and be saved. Or own it

not—after next Saturday—even to your own heart.”

“That is what I have resolved. No other shall suffer.”

“Hush, we cannot be sure of the limits to suffering; and resolves which rest on our own strength have brittle support. I remember hearing those words from my father’s pulpit.”

“I understand them, Janet, though I am not so good—so religious as you.”

“There is none good, no, not one; and, oh! my child, stronger faith and truer peace may come to you even through tribulation.”

“Stay; I am not yet ready to receive this sort of consolation.”

“I will refrain,” said Janet. “I know, none better, how sweet the world is, and how far off heaven seems to the young, the hopeful.”

“Good night, Janet. Do not grieve that you have spoken.”

“Let me stay with you a little longer.”

“No; it is well—all that has been spoken. It would not be well to give to thought a fuller speech. Your present sympathy is the grain of medicine that does me good, a fuller

measure would be poison. Again, good night."

A little dressing-room communicated with Catherine's chamber, not used by her as such, but convenient as a receptacle for boxes and miscellaneous articles.

As Janet stepped on to the landing, she was conscious of a stir and flutter of garments near the door of the little room, and, no one having better right than herself to be there, she entered, candle in hand, to have her sudden fear dispelled, or—confirmed. What she beheld was Burton fumbling about a shelf, as if making a blind search for something or other.

"Oh! Mrs. Gillespie," whispered the woman, taking the initiative of speaking in a low voice—"oh! Mrs. Gillespie, you will give me a light. My candle has gone out, and I have this minute come here, making sure there was a box of matches on this shelf."

Some people are always ready with a lie coined neatly, like base metal from a royal mint; and Janet Gillespie had her own opinion about Hannah Burton's veracity and unveracity, and would have liked her explanation better had "this minute" been omitted.

"Yes, I will give you a light," replied Janet, speaking in the same low tone ; "but let us be quiet, lest we disturb some one."

Alas! Janet was anxious not to "disturb" Catherine, and give her reason to suspect that Burton had listened at the middle door. The mere apprehension of the consequences of such a thing was a new trouble to the devoted old nurse.

As for Burton, she acted innocence and ignorance admirably ; nevertheless, she was not the woman to be six months in a house without mastering the situation—without knowing the character of every lock, without appraising the density of every door, and the capabilities of their key-holes and crevices. She had been slightly piqued by being recommended to retire, and before she took the trouble of descending from her own room, she knew perfectly well that that "middle door" had been hastily constructed, and had so warped that the ear could easily satisfy itself of all that was passing on the other side. There was but to remove the key, and the eye, too, had a certain limited range.

Burton was the type of a class, not very numerous, it is to be hoped, but still so sufficiently distributed as to be recognised by experienced observers. In most respects she was the direct opposite of Janet Gillespie. Sprung from the very dregs of the people, Hannah Burton had no gentle memories to soften and refine her character, but the hard rind of her coarse nature had, in some sort, been smoothed over by circumstances, till, in outward bearing, she passed muster very creditably. It was her satisfactory appearance which had attracted Mrs. Brindley, who had engaged her in the days when Mrs. Freeth leaned on her friend for advice and assistance.

Picked out of a gutter, a keen-eyed, thin-lipped, elf-locked girl of ten or eleven years old, she had been taught and trained by philanthropists, and then sent out to service. Alas! that the teaching and training had not begun years earlier, when the human clay was softer to fashion! Shrewd and clever she was to learn all that could advance her present personal interest, and quick-witted enough to see that a certain amount of prudence and pro-

priety would be her best stepping-stones in life. Without family ties or human affections, all her desires centred in herself; and from very early days she had had a well-defined ambition to rise in the world—an ambition which would have been laudable had it been allied to generous instead of sordid attributes. At first, a mere drudge to a mechanic's wife, it was a sort of rise to be the Cinderella to other servants in a large millinery establishment; but chance one day revealed that she was worthy of better things, had gifts of imitation, and could use her needle with a certain skill. She was promoted to the work-room—a school for good and evil.

Henceforward, her way was comparatively clear; though she had filled half a dozen situations before we find her at eight-and-twenty a lady's-maid, with a gold watch by her side, clothes enough in her boxes to last a dozen years, and with fifty pounds in the savings-bank. Surely, from some points of view, she was a model domestic servant, one who could boast of her "character," and appraised her own acquirements very, very accurately! But,

for all that, she was a thoroughly heartless woman, greedy of money, and of any sort of power which might lead to money-getting, as only those people can be who have not fineness enough of sense for any nobler passion than that of avarice.

This was the woman who, long ago jealous of Janet Gillespie's power in the household, and lately somewhat disappointed at seeing a young girl, whom she thought insufferable and inefficient, promoted to be Catherine's own maid at Five Oaks, instead of herself,—this was the woman who had listened at the warped door, and heard fateful words, only half understood, it is true, and who, through the key-hole, had seen the tears on Catherine's cheek. And the words and the tears were henceforth a memory and a power.

The next morning was clear and frosty, with the subdued light of a real January day. Up rose the wintry sun, scarcely high enough to be noticed above the London houses; but its beams were cheerful throughout the day, and rosy at its early setting. It was just the

weather which the young and vigorous find exhilarating and delightful, but which chills and saddens the old and weary, and shakes roughly the sands in their glass.

By an early train arrived Reuben Appersley, looking radiant and joyous, without a shadow on his brow. His mother had declined the fatigue of a Winter journey, and remained at Five Oaks, caring more about the due preparation for the reception, a fortnight hence, of her son's wife than to be actually present at his marriage. Though Hubert Freeth would have liked very much to see his sister on this occasion, nobody was greatly distressed at her decision, for Mrs. Appersley was a personage who awed and controlled people more than she endeared herself to them.

Then, by appointment, came the lawyer with marriage settlement parchments, to the reading of which the elder members of the family listened. Reuben's settlement on his wife was liberal in the extreme, exceeding by thousands the sum which had been talked of between him and her father. Hubert Freeth was touched at the surprise, and pressed Reuben's hand signifi-

cantly. Catherine was not stupid,—she was better able to understand the plain meanings obscured under the verbose difficulties of lawyers' jargon than are three women out of four; nevertheless, she did not, at first, quite comprehend the state of the case, and that for her life she was to be mistress of seven or eight hundred a year. In fact, Reuben had settled nearly all his unentailed property upon her. When she did comprehend the truth, she knew she ought to be grateful,—and yet her gratitude oppressed her.


Later in the day,—the day preceding their marriage, when the subject was glanced at between themselves,—Catherine said, though with a tearful smile, “Am I thankless, Reuben, to wish this had not been? I should better have liked to be more dependent.”

“Darling, darling” he replied, “I am right to have had my will in this,—but thanks must never be spoken between us.”

That night, when Catherine slipped her rings from her fingers, the diamond one came off with the rest. She had “thinned,” though not in “a day!” Was it an omen she ought to

have accepted? Not yet—not quite yet, was it too late to draw back, and remain unwedded? But no, Catherine Freeth's late resolve was not to be shaken,—and before noon the next day she had taken the irrevocable vows which bound her till “death should them part” to her cousin, Reuben Appersley.

Not worth while, is it, to describe the wedding, the customary pageant and ordained routine, through which Catherine moved as one in a dream. The smiles and the tears, congratulations, formal or hearty,—*déjeûner* speeches, pointed and prosy, were what we have all seen and heard on similar occasions. Reuben looked the “happy man” he was said to be, and Catherine a calm and dignified bride. One little incident piqued curiosity, and seemed to baffle conjecture. In the course of the morning a lovely bouquet of flowers, more rare than any which had been provided, coloured flowers from some choice conservatory, was left at the door for Mrs. Reuben Appersley, with the best wishes of a friend. Evidently, it was intended for the bride's travelling bouquet; but the messenger



hurried away, only leaving the flowers to make their own sweetness acceptable.

When the time came for Reuben and his bride to start for the Isle of Wight, when eager hands were helping to wrap Catherine's ermine-lined cloak about her, and loving hearts were prepared for the farewell, some one reminded her of the choice bouquet ; yet, nevertheless, it appeared to be forgotten at the last moment, and, amid the crowd and confusion of leave-taking, the beautiful flowers came into Burton's hands.

"Mrs. Gillespie," said the woman, looking Janet full in the face, "do you think I may keep these here flowers as a sort of a keepsake from dear Miss—I mean Mrs. Reuben Appersley that is?"

"No doubt, you may," replied Janet ; "but you had better tell the young ladies that you have taken them—at any rate, I don't want them, I assure you."

Burton knew that perfectly well—knew that Janet would not have touched them, except to throw them into a ditch. If to Burton the

giver's name was blazoned on every petal, how much more sure must Janet Gillespie be from whence they came! It rejoiced her heart that Catherine thus quietly rejected the offering, even though the flowers were cherished and dried and carefully preserved by Hannah Burton.

CHAPTER III.

THE CUP OF COLD WATER.

Hers is a spirit, deep and crystal-clear ;
 Calmly beneath her earnest face it lies
 Free without boldness, meek without a fear,
 Quicker to look than speak its sympathies ;
 Far down into her large and patient eyes
 I gaze, deep-drinking of the infinite,
 As in the mid-watch of a clear, still night
 I look into the fathomless blue skies.

LOWELL.

SIX months have passed, and it is Midsummer-time instead of Midwinter. Well we know that the gradual day by day changes through which the seasons revolve work mightier wonders than earthquake or hurricane, and that the procession of the seasons has been for ages the type of human life. Only that wintry age finds not on earth another Spring.

The "day by day" changes through which sweet ties are strained or severed, and hearts fall apart, are often more gradual than the lengthening and shortening of our days, and the brightening and dulling of our sunshine; and to poor Mrs. Freeth the bright Summer-time was associated with a wintry loneliness of heart, as if prison walls of ice had slowly and silently grown up round about her.

Catherine's marriage had been a great break-up of the habit and routine of the mother's life; and this, too, at a period when the momentary chaos, which all great change occasions, was only just settling into new forms of order. Mrs. Freeth was not what is considered a clever or intellectual woman, nor did she deserve to be thought a worldly-wise one; indeed, it may be that her husband would have admired in her some good share of shrewdness and tact, and might have fallen in love with her over again—if, as yet, he had fallen out of it—had she displayed just now unflagging spirits and untiring energies. Like the generality of men, he could do pretty well without sympathy, but not without cheerfulness in his surroundings;

and, alas ! his Bessie was not half so cheerful and hopeful as she had been in the by-gone days of obscurity and narrow fortune. Her tearful anxiety and eager questioning at the time of the Fenfield trouble had positively bored and irritated him, and had had the effect of making him infinitely more reticent for the future about grave affairs.

Is it by some law of compensation in this world that every fulfilled wish brings with it a looming shadow of unforeseen care, and that troubles, in their removal, very often tear away entangled blessings, just as in plucking up a weed we may ruin a flower ?

Another season of London gaiety was fast drawing to a close, and Mrs. Freeth had experienced, in its full bitterness, the "loneliness of a crowd." Her younger daughters were too much absorbed in their studies, too full of eager, undefined hopes and expectations, and every way too inexperienced in life, to give their mother the sympathy she was mutely seeking. Mrs. Freeth liked Hester Otway, made a companion of her when possible, and fanned the flame of her own regard by a hundred little

ting down. As she did so, she looked across the room, and met the earnest gaze of Janet Gillespie. The old nurse, with Burton and one or two other upper servants, was watching the youthful dancers from the doorway. In a minute they had to make way for the musicians, who were returning from taking refreshments; and, as there was to be more dancing before supper, Jane's playing ceased, and they resumed their duties.

For the remainder of the evening, Catherine busied herself to the utmost of her ability with the amusements of the children; but she made strange blunders, calling them by their wrong names, and by no means sustained the reputation her father had awarded her for ready tact and the skilful employment of resources.

Meanwhile, Algernon again found himself by Hester's side. Cautiously, and yet at last very boldly, he spoke of Catherine, her beauty, her grace; and, *apropos* of the approaching marriage, asked questions about Reuben Appersley.

"Is he young?" inquired Raybrooke.

"Oh, yes," replied Hester; "only about four and twenty."

"And handsome?"

"Very."

"A life-long attachment, I suppose?"

"I suppose so."

"Every way suitable, I imagine?"

"Ye-es."

"Is the man worthy of such a girl?"

"Oh, yes, yes, he is good and clever, and worthy of a noble woman for his wife."

Algernon looked at Hester as he spoke, and observed that her usual paleness had given way to a blush which flushed to her forehead, and even tinted her throat. He read her secret, but without knowledge, without comprehension of details, therefore it was wrapped in a haze of falsities. Yet he felt a strange pity, a real sympathy—a something which made him feel that there was a link ready forged between him and Hester Otway.

kindnesses, for which the governess was affectionately grateful. But the sweet, strong tie which weaves itself about the heart in family relations, the tie of a common past, was wanting between them, and there were limits to their sympathy. Death had already begun to reap among the old friends of former years, and the two or three survivors of the band were separated from Mrs. Freeth by circumstances and distance.

If not to the "loveliest," yet to the "nearest thing" the human heart will too often be found to cling, and by very slow degrees Mrs. Freeth had grown to divest herself almost entirely of responsibility, and to rely upon Mrs. Brindley's judgment in every affair pertaining to household management, and the toils and pleasures of society. Telford House was a very pleasant second home to that lady. Catherine's former room was given up quite three weeks out of every four to Mrs. Brindley, and called her room, while the dressing room was fitted up for Aline, who, of course, could not be left at home. The arrangement was one which seemed to charm and delight all parties.

One morning the elder ladies were sitting together looking over accounts, writing notes, filing receipts, and, in the intervals of meditation or composition, indulging in interjectional remarks of a domestic and confidential character.

The failure of Mrs. Freeth's sight had months since become sufficiently marked for her to have adopted spectacles, but this morning the glasses seemed more dim than usual, and several times she had wiped them with her handkerchief, but without visible improvement.

"Dear Mrs. Brindley," she exclaimed at last, "do look over this bill and read it to me if you can. I always think that weekly bills are made out in the most ridiculous writing and most puzzling manner in the world, but I cannot really follow this one at all. The others are nearly unintelligible to me this week—but this is the worst of any."

"Oh, I shall make it out, I daresay; pray give it to me," and, as she spoke, Mrs. Brindley stretched out her hand for the long narrow strip of bluish paper, which anyone would have known for what it was—say, by way of conventional exaggeration, a mile off.

Mrs. Brindley read aloud the important document glibly as she might the page of a book, and yet found momentary intervals in which she looked up and gazed for an instant on her friend, who was shading her eyes with her hand.

"My dear," she exclaimed, after the account had been pronounced quite correct, "I think you ought to change your spectacles for some of higher power."

"Do you, indeed?" replied Mrs. Freeth. "Why, I had a new pair only six weeks ago, and the optician declared if I went on in that manner, giving way to the want of stronger magnifiers, I should take an old woman's glasses before I was fifty."

"My dear," continued Mrs. Brindley, after a slight pause, "if I were you I would see an oculist; I think you must have tried your eyes very much in bygone years, and perhaps they require some treatment besides the use of glasses."

"That is very much what Catherine said when she was in town, and if she had only staid a little longer I believe she would have

insisted on my having advice,—that is, if she had quite realized how weak my eyes were. The fact is, I cried a good deal while she was here, and I thought it was that which made my sight fail.”

“I believe weeping is very bad for the sight,” said Mrs. Brindley sympathetically.

“I could not help it. In the first place, it was a terrible disappointment to me that Reuben and she shortened their visit to three days—and—and then I could not help feeling a sort of shock at seeing Catherine look so thin and ill.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Reuben does not seem improved in health by her residence in Meadshire; she is thinner, no doubt. But perhaps she takes more exercise than she did in London.”

“I don’t know. I hardly call driving about in a phaeton taking exercise; and she told me herself, horse exercise, of which she used to be so fond, seemed now too much for her. However we are thinking of going to Shinglebeach in August, and Reuben has promised to bring Catherine to meet us there, and stay a week or two at any rate.”

"Shinglebeach of all places in the world!" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley in a tone of ironical astonishment, "and for the second time in your life. What on earth is the attraction that makes you choose such a retreat?"

"Don't you like it? Oh, we enjoyed it last year very much. There is such a beautiful open sea, and the country round about is very pretty."

"But it is such a dull place; you won't meet a soul you know. It is the haunt only of nursemaids and children. A friend of mine, who, by missing a train or steamboat, or something or another, was imprisoned there for half a day, declared he was almost lamed for life by knocking against these newly-invented machines—perambulators, I think they are called—they so crowded the thoroughfares."

"He must have been very careless, I think," replied Mrs. Freeth, with the utmost gravity; "not that I altogether approve of the perambulators. I would not put Lucy in one for the world. But I am sorry you despise poor little Shinglebeach. I am afraid, after what you

have said, it would be a mere compliment to ask you and Aline to visit us there."

Mrs. Brindley bit her lip, but not outwardly. She did wonder that anyone, with the world of sea-side places from which to choose, could deliberately select a quiet little "town," as it called itself; a town that consisted of three or four bunches of houses; an immature High street; a bathing establishment; a reading-room and a chapel; a town where a crier regularly proclaimed the stirring events of the day—notifying that fresh fish had just been caught, or that a cameo brooch had been lost near the coast-guard station—a crier who could come within earshot of every inhabitant in half an hour. Nevertheless, she answered:

"Oh, for that matter, I should not be dull where you were, and I believe the air is very bracing."

"I am sure it is. We were all so well there last year, and so happy!" and Mrs. Freeth sighed gently at the recollection. "Still I would not ask you to come if you thought you should be moped; and, of course, my dear friend, you will make this house your home

whenever it suits you, whether we are at home or not."

"You are very good."

"Not good at all; it would be a comfort to know that the servants were not left wholly to themselves—that is, I mean to say——" stammered Mrs. Freeth, who felt that her additional over-frank remark had taken all grace from her proffered hospitality.

But Mrs. Brindley was not touchy, and she merely answered—

"My dear, I quite understand."

At this moment luncheon was announced, but the ladies did not hurry to obey the summons to what is always an unceremonious meal. The children had already gone downstairs, and, with Hester Otway, had taken their seats at table. Mrs. Brindley preceded her hostess, and, at the bottom of the stairs, was met by Aline, who seemed to have been waiting for her mother. Nor was she the only occupant of the hall. Within these few minutes, an elderly woman, the bearer of a letter to Miss Otway, had been admitted, and was now seated on one of the hall chairs. At first she had only asked, very

civilly, to be allowed to see Miss Otway; but suddenly, just as Aline had appeared on the stairs—Burton following her to restore a handkerchief she had dropped, merely saying, “Miss Brindley, this is yours, I believe”—the strange woman had seemed to grow faint, and, still clutching fast the letter for Hester, had sunk into a chair, as if from sudden fatigue.

“My good woman, what is the matter?” said Mrs. Freeth, with genuine kindness, approaching the stranger as she spoke.

“Nothing, madam, nothing that can be helped; only—only a bad spasm to which I am subject. But I beg for a glass of water, that is all;” and Aline, hearing the words, glided into the dining-room, and quickly returned with the pure, sparkling draught.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Freeth had, in an undertone, suggested wine, but Mrs. Brindley, who lingered with her in the hall, had murmured that possibly the stranger was an impostor, and had meaningly shaken her head. It seemed hardly possible that the words, half whispered, half implied, could have reached the woman’s understanding, and yet, at the moment, an ex-

pression of acute agony passed across her countenance as she lifted her eyes and looked intently at Mrs. Brindley. It was a look of long-endured, yet freshly-aroused, suffering, dashed with mute entreaty, as if some last poor dregs of human hope were, for a moment, upheaved from the depths of the soul, yet only to be shown on the wave of despair. A look to haunt a painter, and defy his powers to render; a look that almost frightened Mrs. Freeth, and which she never forgot; a look that made Mrs. Brindley drop her eyes and change her opinion; a look that melted Aline almost to tears, and made her hand tremble as she gave the glass of water to the stranger. Was it by accident that their fingers touched for an instant, or was it that they would willingly have interlaced?

"Thank you—thank you, and may God requite you!" said the woman, rising to put down the half-emptied glass—but who shall say if it was the "cup of cold water" for which she was thus emphatically grateful, or the tearful sympathy of the cup-bearer? It was singular—as obstinate facts often are—that Aline's countenance, transfigured by her pity, and the

stranger's face, mobile in its suffering, flashed for a moment into likeness marked and strong. The resemblance faded away by degrees; and, after all, likeness is a sort of will-o'-the-wisp thing, that comes and goes—that is often totally absent in near relations, and yet crops out in the most unexpected quarters.

Meanwhile, Hester had received an intimation that she was wanted, but it being a standing rule that no one part of the family ever waited for others at the luncheon—which was likewise the children's dinner—she was busy carving a joint, and helping the young people.

“Say I am engaged, but will come presently,” she had replied to the servant who brought the message. And thus it happened that there had been delay, and the stranger still grasped the letter she had to deliver.

Suddenly the woman seemed to change her resolve, and, holding out the letter to Aline, she exclaimed—

“Will you, young lady, give this to Miss Otway?—give it with your own hands?”

“Indeed, I will,” replied Aline; “you may depend upon me.”

"Depend upon you!" murmured the woman, as if to herself; and while the rustle of silk dresses proclaimed that the hostess and her friend had passed into the dining-room, Aline still lingered in the hall to hear the stranger's wishes.

"I will go now," sighed the woman, when Aline had taken the letter, and moving to the door.

"Will you not wait longer and rest?" exclaimed the young girl; "I am sure Mrs. Freeth would wish you to do so. Besides, perhaps the letter will require an answer."

"No, there will be no answer, and I must go. Only let me look at you once more. I knew a face something like yours forty years ago. For the sake of that memory let me—let me kiss your hand."

Aline, wonder-stricken, was herself passive; but as the woman pressed her lips to the hand tears fell on it; and Aline, touched, she scarcely knew why, was not altogether composed when she approached the luncheon-table and laid a bulky letter near Hester's plate.

The superscription was in a strange hand—

and yet the strangeness recalled something vaguely remembered, or once familiar; and as soon as Hester had finished carving, a natural feminine curiosity impelled her to unravel the mystery.

"Excuse me," she said, as she broke the seal. It was a packet of bank-notes that fell into her lap as she drew from the envelope a half sheet of note-paper, on which was written :

"For Hester Otway's sole use. The money is honestly earned, and duly hers. If she wearies of her present life, let her take comfort. Some day independence may be hers."

A slight ejaculation and a flushed cheek proclaimed that the communication she had received was something more unexpected than a letter of friendly gossip or a moderate milliner's bill. But only friends were present, and though, obviously, this was not exactly the moment to take them into her confidence, she admitted the letter was a great surprise, and that she would like to speak to Mrs. Freeth about it, presently.

"Certainly," replied the lady; "but, dear Miss Otway, do not let the news take away your ap-

petite—you are scarcely eating anything. I hope it is not bad news——”

“No, not bad news, certainly,” said Hester, “though I am afraid it *has* taken away my appetite.”

“Then you must dine again at seven o'clock,” replied the hostess.

“Oh, you are very good, but, indeed, I shall not require another dinner.”

“Yes, you will,” pursued the lady; “we shall be quite alone, and my husband said yesterday that he had not seen you for a week—and you know he always likes a chat with you.”

Hester could not do otherwise, after all, than smile, and assent to the proposal so pleasantly made.

CHAPTER IV.

A T E T E - A - T E T E .

There's nothing certain but the unforeseen.

P. J. BAILEY.

IT occurred to Mrs. Freeth that the news which could take away Hester's appetite might, perhaps, incapacitate her from giving afternoon lessons, so she was kind enough to propose a half-holiday, and draw the governess away to the little inner drawing-room, where she could receive her confidence.

To do Mrs. Brindley justice, it must be owned that she did not attempt to intrude, but said, as she passed upstairs to her room,

"I am going with Aline as far as Regent

Street, presently; can we do anything for you?"

"Thanks, no," replied the lady; "but won't you have the brougham? You may just as well."

"Are you quite sure you will not want it yourself?" said Mrs. Brindley.

"Quite sure; I am not going out at all to-day."

"Well, then, as you are so very kind."

And the hostess rang the drawing-room bell, and directed a servant to go round to the stables, and say that the brougham would be wanted in half an hour.

Meanwhile, Phoebe and Jane withdrew to the school-room—but not to school-tasks, or turning the leaves of school-books. No, they quickly decided that their half-holiday should be spent in the high revelry of novel-reading. They could not find the first volume of the last new book which had come from the library—it happened to be lying on Mrs. Brindley's dressing-table—but they comforted themselves with the second and third; and as the book happened to be rather episodical, the two girls were soon absorbed in

their occupation. Phœbe had seized the second volume, which seemed to be the next best thing to having the beginning, and soon found herself in the thick of the plot, and so interested in the elopement of a pair of lovers that she forgot to toss back her curls. But Jenny rejoiced over quarrels made up, mistakes explained, foes reconciled, true love requited, and virtue magnificently rewarded—all of which seemed as tuneful to her young heart as a peal of marriage bells. Ah, we all dip into each other's lives, as these young girls did into their novel, and mostly the first volume is missing!

The half hour's *tête-à-tête* between Mrs. Freeth and Hester Otway was memorable to both of them, for it seemed to draw them affectionately nearer. Mrs. Freeth read the mysterious letter, and handled the crisp bank-notes—they were five tens and five twenties—but did not venture to give any positive opinion as to the propriety or impropriety of appropriating a gift so strangely offered.

“But, dear Miss Otway,” she said, “my husband will advise you, and I am sure whatever he tells you to do will be right. Dear me,” she

continued, after a slight pause, "if this unknown friend keeps his word, perhaps you will be rich, and not choose to be troubled with teaching. I shall be so sorry, that is, I shall be so sorry to lose you, but very glad, of course, of anything which is for your happiness. I am sure we look upon you almost as one of the family."

"Then let me stay with you as long as I can be useful," replied Hester, in a voice that showed her heart was touched. "I am little likely ever to be rich, but even if this unknown benefactor should render me independent——"

"Why then," interrupted Mrs. Freeth, "then, my dear, there would be many things to consider; and, perhaps, after all, he will not make himself known at present, and meanwhile Phoebe and Jane will be getting on with their studies. I am sure you have done wonders with them—not that I ever expect them to be as clever as Catherine."

"Jane has excellent abilities, I assure you," replied the governess, "and her warm heart quickens her intellect. Phoebe is certainly more volatile."

"I know that," said the mother. "I often feel as if little Jenny were the elder of the two."

"And yet Phoebe is, in some respects, very womanly for her age."

"Ah, perhaps other people see that more than I do," returned Mrs. Freeth; "it seems but the other day they were all little morsels in the nursery, and I myself young; and now I have a daughter married and a son grown up. You cannot imagine how the last year seems to have aged me."

It was a very cheerful meal, that rather luxurious family dinner, of which Hester had been invited to partake. Under Mrs. Brindley's influence, the good cook was allowed to keep "her hand in," even when there was no company, so that dainty dishes were a matter of course; then the dining-room was cool and airy—a great thing in Summer time—and the Wenham ice, now considered a daily necessity, was bright and abundant. Hester Otway was not foolish, not callous by nature, and therefore could not be insensible to the pleasures of refinement; she

felt very keenly what a power for pleasantness money was, and could not quite hinder her imagination from building airy fabrics concerning the unknown benefactor. Nevertheless, she had decided to be entirely guided by Mr. Freeth's opinion with regard to the propriety of her appropriating any part of the money so strangely received.

Mrs. Freeth had given her husband a hint of the affair, but, of course, nothing could be said in the presence of servants. But when they had departed, and the strawberries were being leisurely enjoyed, Hubert Freeth exclaimed :

"I see Miss Otway so seldom, I shall keep her for a comrade while I take my claret ; besides, if I am to unravel a mystery, I must not have too many suggesters present. You can send us our coffee here, and we will join the ladies, by and by."

There was a little laugh of assent, and, in due time, the hostess, with Mrs. Brindley and Aline, withdrew.

And then Hubert Freeth gave his best attention to the story of the day. Of course, he read the anonymous letter, and compared it with the

direction ; the hand-writing was evidently the same. He held up each bank-note to the light, and declared them all genuine ; moreover, he observed that they were new notes, with consecutive numbers.

"These notes," he observed, his hand resting on the outspread heap, "there can be no doubt, are fresh from a banker's ; they are no miser's slowly gathered store, but the change for some check or draft. It is, certainly, a curious incident. My advice is to invest the money—not spend it. Stay, let me look at the envelope again."

"There is nothing to remark about it," said Hester, giving it, however, into his hand as she spoke.

"Nothing to remark !" continued Mr. Freeth ; "my dear young lady, I differ from you there. In the first place, this envelope has been folded in three—hence, I judge, it has been sent from a distance ; and some other hand than that of the writer has been intrusted to place the bank-notes in it."

"How strange !" cried Hester, with increased interest, leaning her elbow on the table, and

her cheek on her hand, as she watched Mr. Freeth's countenance; "the more I reflect, the more unfathomable the mystery seems."

"I would not venture quite to say so," replied Mr. Freeth, and his manner had a little deepened in seriousness. "I think I ought to point out to you that this envelope has, in all human probability, travelled from the Antipodes."

"Why so, Mr. Freeth?—oh! pray tell me!" and, as Hester spoke, she involuntarily shaded her face. A wild thought was beating for admission into her mind, and making her heart bound.

"Simply," replied Mr. Freeth, speaking very calmly, and not looking at her—"because the maker's name is embossed, though faintly, and not quite in the English manner, and I see the street is no London street, and it is followed by 'Melbo;' the remainder of the word is obliterated by the seal."

"You think it is Melbourne?" said Hester, in a husky whisper.

"I am sure of it," returned Mr. Freeth; "and, on second thought, I think you may venture to

spend the money, if you like. Your scruples are very proper, but, to relieve you from them, let me be your banker. I will be answerable for the amount, and ready to restore it, if need be."

"Will you really take charge of it? Then, pray do so," said Hester, pushing the notes towards him, but recovering the envelope, which she examined with a trembling hand.

"But keep a portion of it, if you in the least need money," continued Mr. Freeth.

"Which I do not; though I feel your generous kindness, Mr. Freeth, none the less."

"Nay, nay, my opinion is that you have a right to this money, and that you will hear again from this unknown benefactor."

Hester was silent for a little while, and then she exclaimed, with a passionate earnestness not common to her manner—

"Oh! Mr. Freeth, do not spare my feelings; tell me if your thought is my thought—tell me if you think my father must be living—you who knew him so well?"

"I do think so. Moreover, I suspect the letter is in his handwriting, and that this money

came from him. *I* always believed that he did proceed to Australia."

"Oh! that my poor mother had lived!" sobbed Hester; "she would have forgiven everything."

"There was a mystery in his flight," continued Mr. Freeth, "which I never could fathom. It would be strange if, after twenty years, we should see it explained. I confess, I should like to know more of the messenger, the strange, faded woman Mrs. Brindley describes, and in whom her daughter seems so much interested."

"I wish I had seen her," mused Hester; "but, I understand, she did not part with the letter until she was on the point of leaving the house; and, not guessing its importance, I allowed it to remain unopened for several minutes. There was no possibility of detaining or questioning her."

"She was evidently prepared to evade inquiry," observed Mr. Freeth; "and I do not think it would be generous, in the present stage of affairs, to make any determined effort to unravel the mystery."

“Not for worlds would I do anything to give *him* pain, if really he is alive,” said Hester.

“Well, it is a romantic little history,” continued Mr. Freeth, trying to give a cheerful turn to the conversation, “quite apart from any conjecture which can link it with past events. The shabby-genteel old woman, apparently subject to fainting-fits—for nothing happened, I believe, that could possibly affect her?”

“Nothing, I should say. She had merely asked for me, and Aline Brindley was coming quietly downstairs, when the woman turned pale and trembled.”

“The shabby old woman, I was going to say, looks to me like a trustworthy messenger; I feel positively interested in her. I shall get my wife to repeat her description of the poor thing over again.”

And this Mrs. Freeth did a few minutes later, when her husband and Hester appeared in the drawing-room. Afterwards, Mr. Freeth withdrew to his study; and, while Phoebe and Jane played a brilliant duet, Hester was regaled with the sight of Mrs. Brindley’s purchases, and

acquired a "wrinkle" or two concerning the fashions, which she turned to good account in her own arrangements for the sea-side toilet she would soon be requiring.

CHAPTER V.

AT SHINGLEBEACH AGAIN.

'Tis ever Sabbath by the sea,
So thither I repair,
To list its grand old homily
Sublimely mute in prayer.

EDWARD CAPERN.

BY the middle of August the Freeths were settled at Shinglebeach. The weather was brilliant, and they had a house even more commodious than the one they had occupied a year ago. But Mrs. Freeth was learning a new little lesson, and discovering that no sort of history precisely repeats itself,—and that the pains and pleasures of domestic life evolve with as many differences, as do the great events which swell the ever-unrolling chronicle of world-famous deeds and world-controlling circumstances.

The little town, with its esplanade and terraces, its stand of saddled donkeys for juvenile riders, and goat-carriages for minute occupants, its pleasant beach and pleasanter pier, was absolutely unchanged. The voice of the crier seemed tuned to the same high pitch as ever, and the waves broke on the pebbles with the old harmonious roar. The sun dipped down in the West with all its well-remembered blazonry, and the moonlight nights scattered their *largesse* on the sea with all the olden lavishness, and yet—and yet Mrs. Freeth felt that everything was different from last year.

She was not happy, and she did not grow happier for being angry and ashamed of herself for her discontent. Perhaps when Catherine joined them, so she argued to herself, her spirits would improve, and the enjoyments of last year would be resumed; and accordingly she wrote to expedite Catherine's coming—and when the day for her arrival was fixed, the mother counted the hours with tender longing, and the flutter of happy expectation made her more cheerful than before.

For a wonder, Mrs. Freeth was a little selfish,

—she wanted to be the very first to meet and greet her daughter, but, on second thoughts, and in consideration of her defective sight, she permitted Jane to be her companion, and theirs were the upturned faces at the bottom of the stairs which Catherine recognized as she passed the barrier at the railway platform. Kisses and hand-squeezing were the work of a moment, —and, almost before words were spoken, Mrs. Freeth and Catherine were in the open carriage *vis-à-vis* to Reuben and Jane, packed close with shawls and bags, while the porter was taking charge of heavier baggage.

Mrs. Freeth would have said it was a very happy moment, and yet she burst into tears. Here was fruition of the long-desired meeting, and why should she be conscious of a vague, blank disappointment? Catherine looked pale, it is true, but she owned to fatigue from a wearisome, cross-country journey, and perhaps Reuben was more solemn and serious than of old, because he was sorry that Catherine was tired. This little train of reasoning flashed quickly through her mind, for, where feelings were the motive power, that mind was quick to

reason; and soon Catherine, touched by her mother's emotion, grew flushed and tearful herself. And the flush looked like bloom, and the blue eyes sparkled through their mist with filial love and yearning tenderness.

This year Hubert Freeth had not held out a hope of visiting his family at Shinglebeach. He was far too busy, he said, to indulge in holidays, besides, if he could spare a little time for pleasure, he wanted to go to Switzerland,—he had got some notions about mountain tunnelling which he should like to verify by geological examinations,—indeed, with this object in view, he should probably make time for a brief excursion. And, as his wife had by this time discovered that Hubert generally contrived to achieve whatever he “wanted” very much to do, Mrs. Freeth, in her heart, considered the trip to Switzerland a settled thing. Something to this effect she said to Reuben Appersley one morning, less than a week after his arrival at Shinglebeach.

“Then I think I shall run up to town for a few days and see my uncle,” he replied; “I

want to speak to him about two or three things."

"But perhaps he is not at home just now," rejoined Mrs. Freeth. "You have no idea how he flies about the country,—he gets a telegram from a superintendent of some of the works, and is off, perhaps, at an hour's notice."

"I think as he is so uncertain," continued Reuben, "the best way is to take my chance. If you knew positively that he was at home to-day, that might really be a reason why he would be less likely to be found there to-morrow."

"Reuben," said Mrs. Freeth, with meek, good-humoured raillery, "I am afraid you are like the rest of the men, and find Shinglebeach dull. Own the truth, we will promise not to be offended, won't we, Kate?"

"Well, Aunt, it is not a lively place," replied Reuben, who was already sufficiently the married man not to wait deferentially for his wife's reply; "I do wonder what you all can have seen in it, to come here a second time. Why, even 'Punch' has had a laugh at the place and its one policeman."

"Now I think it delightful," returned Mrs. Freeth, "to be in a place where there are no rogues and thieves to want the police, and where one leaves the street-door open from morning till night without fear of robbery. Why, I left a shawl on the pier one day, and Teddy ran back and found it for me an hour afterwards. And, after all, my dear Reuben, it must be more lively than Five Oaks."

"Ah, but at Five Oaks I am at home, and have my own interests and occupations. There are generally colts and puppies to look after, besides the crops to consider, either for plague or profit, as the case may be. And then one's known to everybody. I assure you I ride and drive for hours sometimes without meeting a stranger, or passing any one who has not a bow of some sort for me."

"But, Reuben dear," said Catherine, in a voice of great sweetness, and with almost a touch of tenderness in her manner—"Reuben dear, you know that cannot be, except in your own neighborhood; and, if you would but travel about a little more, you would soon grow to like new places, and cease to feel neglected or isolated."

"I know, Kitty; you have said all that before."

"Have I? I don't remember." Yet in Catherine's heart she remembered having thought it before.

"I shall come back to you in a few days," resumed Reuben, "unless, indeed, anything special occurs to take me elsewhere; and Kitty can write to me; and, perhaps, some day or another I may grow to like rushing about the world. Meanwhile, it will be quite an event to have a letter from her. I declare I have hardly seen Katie's handwriting since we have been married, and she has persuaded me to burn all our love-letters. I do think I shall go up to town this afternoon."

"Then I'll order the early dinner to be very punctual," said Mrs. Freeth; "and there they are, crying live fish just out of the sea! Reuben, which do you prefer, soles or whittings? They are both perfectly delicious when fresh caught,—at any rate, you can't get fish in such perfection, except on the coast; and it's so cheap, too!" she added, with the old accustomed thought of frugality, which was still a fitful habit with her, though no longer a principle. "But we'll only

call it luncheon, though, for you must order yourself a proper dinner when you reach Telford House, if Hubert should not be at home. Your journey ought to give you an appetite; and, Reuben, be sure to tell them to put you in Lionel's room, because I know his bed is well aired,—Lionel being so little at home, his room is always on my mind."

"Thanks, Aunty, for all your forethought, and I'll go to Telford House, if you really wish it; but if, in your absence, it would be in the least inconvenient, I could easily put up at an hotel."

"Oh, what an idea! how could it be inconvenient? And who knows? perhaps, after all, your uncle may be at home to receive you."

"And mamma and I," said Catherine, "will sit on the beach, and enjoy the sea and the sunsets, just as we did last year, and pity your want of taste in leaving us. Was it really, though, only last year? It seems so much longer ago to me."

"So it does to me," said Mrs. Freeth. "I suppose it is because so many things have happened since last Autumn."

"Yes," continued Catherine, "and I seem to

myself so much older. I can hardly fancy that I am only twenty. Reuben, dear, don't you sometimes feel as if I must be thirty at least?"

"Kitty, how can I think such an absurdity, when I know your age to a day? But you do say such odd things sometimes."

"Well, dear, if I live to be thirty, perhaps I shall be wiser; I did not mean to be absurd, I assure you. Please tell papa that I, too, will go up to town for a day to see him, if he cannot come to Shinglebeach; only, not unless I am sure of finding him at home. And, Reuben, if you are writing home to your mother in a day or two, perhaps I need not do so till next week."

"Just as you like; but I shall be sure to write to her from London."

"Then give her my love, and say I am enjoying myself very much. I remember last year wondering if we should ever come here again, and I am grateful for a wish fulfilled. You know how I love the sea. If I were a queen, and had to create a capital, I'd build it on the sea-shore. The sea-breezes would be sure to make fashion less frivolous, and give senators health and energy."

"Is that all that senators need?" asked Reuben, who was apparently pleased that Catherine had assumed a mirthful tone.

"Oh, they need all sorts of good gifts and great qualities," she replied; "and, above all, patience with stupidity, I should say."

"Thorough honesty of purpose would go a good way, I think," said Reuben.

"Ah, that includes so much!"

"What are you both talking about?" interrupted Mrs. Freeth. "Do let us get out before the heat of the day."

CHAPTER VI.

REUBEN APPERSLEY'S PROJECT.

Present and Past

Alike impregnate London's " cloud-capp'd towers "
 With Poesy's own soul.

Man made it? True, but caught by tripping speech,
 Ye do forget the Greater Architect,
 Who formed his workman Man. T.

IT was past six o'clock when Reuben Appersley arrived at the London Bridge terminus. As yet no Charing Cross extension, no Underground Railway, relieved the city traffic, and with less order and more crush than that of bees passing in and out of their hive were the busy London toilers pouring over the bridge, hurrying to the railways, or wending their way to and from the Surrey side of the metropolis. A large proportion of the multitude were coming in one direc-

tion,—coming away from the city, so that Reuben, lolling forward a little in the hansom cab he had selected, encountered their faces as he crossed the bridge. How pale and tired and grimy, for the most part, the people looked, taken individually! And yet the movement, the activity, the kaleidoscope changes of the throng, made up a scene of something more stirring than mere cheerfulness.

Reuben, as we know, professed to dislike London, but, since his marriage, an ambition had awakened in his heart with which London was rather intimately associated. It is this ambition, inclination, or desire—call it what we will—which brings him to town on the present occasion, for, before speaking of it to anyone else, he wishes to consult his uncle-father-in-law on the subject. He is conscious of mixed motives, as honest people very often are, even in apparently simple undertakings; and we shall, in due time, hear his *pros* and *cons* discussed. Meanwhile, his very thoughtfulness sharpened his powers of observation, and trifling, minute circumstances seemed to have meaning and messages to him.

It was a close, warm evening, the last week in August, and the air was heavy and the sky low. The cupola of St. Paul's, the spires of many churches, and all the taller buildings, seemed bathed in a golden mist, while the shipping below bridge lay still as in a picture; only here and there an empty wherry, moored to some heavier craft, rocked lightly and lazily to the rising tide. Little steamers, now stooping their funnels to pass beneath the bridges, now halting, with noisy puff of featherlike vapour, to embark or disembark passengers, then shooting on, like shuttles to weave the city and suburbs together, were at this hour the life of the river, and stirred its surface to mimicry of the ocean. Reuben had time to look about him, and to become interested in the scene, for there was a dead-lock more than once while he was crossing the bridge. On the whole, people bore the delay with decent temper, as an annoyance of which use had taken off the edge. But here and there a high-spirited horse quivered and chafed at the stagnation, and more than one little dog, perched high on bales of goods, barked a shrill snap-pish bark, as if thereby to clear the way.

Waggon and carriages, carts, cabs, and omnibuses, with occupants of every denomination, made up a motley panorama such as only the hour could produce.

Reuben Appersley had never been so impressed with the magnificence of commerce as he felt this Summer evening; and, as in due time the crowd opened, and he was driven at a reasonable pace westward, he was liberal enough, mentally, to acknowledge that town life might be endurable to some sorts of people, after all. He knew perfectly well that it was the dead season with everybody who is anybody; and, no doubt, everything in trade or pleasure was going on with a certain lazy indifferentism. Shopkeepers were lounging about their doors, seeking to inhale the breath of fresh air which seldom found its way behind their counters, and contemplating an early closing. Others were preparing, with flaming gas and attractive ticketing, to make those "frightful sacrifices" which, at the end of the season, are common, and always allure the multitude, whose "hoard is little," though their "hearts are great."

By and by he skirted a theatrical district, and

came upon parties of play-goers—Darby and Joan couples disappearing at the pit entrance; shop-boys, with their pockets full of gingerbread, waiting at the gallery door; and the box company, with their white gloves and gay bouquets, and indispensable fans and scent-bottles, including many a bright-eyed girl, to whom Juliet was a sort of half-sister—though she had never owned as much, even to herself—and Claude Melnotte an ideal hero; but who, nevertheless, had laughter as ready as her tears.

Reuben did not reason or moralise about the groups of people he encountered, or the aspect of the London streets, but everything he saw fell into place in his mind, and deepened the impression he was receiving. Only a few hours ago he had almost rebuked Catherine for feeling older than she was; and now he was conscious of something very like a sudden growth and maturing that had taken place in himself. Well, so much the better; so much the more was he in the right in his present aim. He did feel the responsibility he should be undertaking. Could anyone drive through London, and not feel the responsibility of lifting a finger to the

right or left in national interests?—but why not he, as well as another?—and when he had such firm convictions, and so many motives?

It was nearly seven o'clock when Reuben Appersley came in sight of Telford House, and, as he did so, he, to his great delight, beheld Hubert Freeth ascending the door-steps. It would have been a piece of luck to have heard that he was in town, but to find him absolutely at home was an express kindness of the Fates.

"Why, Reuben!" exclaimed his uncle, turning back when the door was opened, to welcome his guest, "this is an unexpected pleasure; but I hope there is nothing the matter," he continued, a natural apprehension for a moment crossing his mind.

"Oh! no, uncle, I left everybody quite well, I assure you. I only came up to town because I wanted a long talk with you; and there seemed no chance of your coming down to Shinglebeach."

"Quite right, I haven't the time to go dangleing there, throwing stones into the sea, and remembering all the while that I am a mile and a half from a telegraph office, and not knowing

from hour to hour what may happen. And you have just come in the nick of time. Dinner will be ready in less than half an hour."

"That will be delightful," returned Reuben, "and are you quite alone?"

"Yes; I prefer coming home to dining at the club. And our cook almost spoils me. I have a suspicion, though, that that good, kind Mrs. Brindley looks in every day—your aunt made her deputy in her absence—and the result, I assure you, is generally a case of Lucullus dining with Lucullus. We shall see what turns up for to-day. I have no more idea than the man in the moon."

"I believe I should do justice to a mere chop or steak," said Reuben; "but I was to be sure to ask for Lionel's room," he continued; "so I will go and wash my hands, and brush the dust out of my hair."

What "turned up" when the gong sounded was a very small tureen of soup *à la Julien*, followed by a couple of red mullet (which Reuben was epicure enough to prefer to the "fresh whittings" of luncheon), then came dainty rissoles, a morsel of mutton, and a

grouse, with some slight confectionery, and piquant cheese concoctions. Olives and apricots were a sufficient dessert for gentlemen; and Hubert himself took care that the wines were excellent.

"I am so glad you do not think my notion of going into Parliament ridiculous," exclaimed Reuben, who had introduced the subject over the first glass of Burgundy; this being the chief affair about which he wanted to talk.

"Not ridiculous at all; only, as our politics differ, my dear boy, I hardly see of what use I can be to you. However I must think it over; not that there is much time to lose, with the general election so near. But what does Catherine say on the subject?"

"I have not spoken to her about it yet,—that is, seriously. The only time I ever alluded to anything of the sort, she thought I was in jest, but I am quite sure she would like the interest, the employment for me; and, besides, she would enjoy living in London part of the year, I know. In fact, I would not mention it to her till my mind was thoroughly made up, lest a change of my plans should disappoint her. I

am afraid Five Oaks is a little dull for her, poor girl!" And in the tone of the last few words there was something very like a sigh.

"At your age," replied Hubert Freeth, "it would be good for you both to see a little more of the world, a little more of life, I think."

"To tell you the truth, if it had not been for this general election coming on, I should have proposed to Kate a trip on the Continent this Autumn; not that she in the least complains of wanting any further change than the excursion to Shinglebeach, which she seems thoroughly to enjoy. Of course it is natural that she should like to be with her mother and sisters sometimes; and I do hope the sea-air will do her good. I am sure that my wish to be in Parliament is a good deal weighted by the feeling it would give her pleasure to see me of a little importance beyond my own county."

"And your mother? Have you any notion how she would like to see 'M.P.' after your name?"

"Oh! she would be pleased, I am sure. Of course I am not such a fool as to be over-confident. I may have to spend a heap of money,

and still be unsuccessful—that I know. But I have another reason for wishing to try my chance. I hardly ever spoke to you, uncle, about my poor father; but I suppose you remember all the circumstances of his death?”

“Yes, I do,” returned Hubert, gravely.

“Well, it is only within the last year that I extracted all the particulars, and heard about the vile slanders which were circulated at the time, and there is a detestable Radical paper, the *Meadshire Chronicle*, that more than once has revived them; and the truth is, I want to make for myself a position in the world, if only that I may the more effectually scourge the rascals, and prove that, even now, the calumny may be exposed.”

“I’d let the thing rest, if I were you,” said Mr. Freeth, filling his glass, and pushing the decanter towards Reuben; “besides, if you were an M.P. to-morrow, I do not see how that could help you.”

“No, nor do I exactly. But I feel that something might then happen to help me—that I should have influence in certain quarters where now I have none—in fact, that I should be able

to sift things to the bottom. It would be something if I could find out what really became of the man Otway, and whether he left any letters or depositions behind him."

"As for Otway," replied Mr. Freeth, "we have never had the least proof of his death."

"But you don't suppose he is alive?" ejaculated Reuben, putting down the glass he had raised half-way to his lips.

"Well, I'd bet an even wager on his life," replied the host.

"You do astonish me," returned Reuben. "If I understand rightly, advertisements were inserted in the colonial newspapers year after year, with the hope of attracting him, till every one was persuaded that he must be dead."

"Most people interested in him thought so, I am aware. But, whether he be dead or alive, my advice still is, wait. Besides, I think it would be a little cruel to his daughter to rake up painful memories of her father."

"I would not hurt Miss Otway's feelings for the world," said Reuben, warmly, "but it seems to me that to vindicate my father is to vindicate hers. What an ass the man was to run away

for the sake of a paltry two or three thousand pounds! Why, I'd have paid the money twice over to have kept him on the spot."

"You forget that you were then a little gentleman of only three years old; there's a picture of you somewhere, I think, in a velvet tunic, and riding a rocking-horse. Perhaps you had a money-box with some lucky sixpences in it, but certainly not a banker's account."

"Still—still it might have been managed."

"Well, perhaps Mr. Otway did not exactly see how. I grant you that the running away seemed the rashest, maddest thing possible. But still my advice is, wait. You know the proverb, 'Let sleeping dogs lie;' and many other things are best left undisturbed. If I were you, I would not be the one to stir up the old hornets' nest of slander."

"But if I could only prove that it is all slander! And, as for poor Miss Otway, I would wish to consider her feelings at least as much as my own; it would be cowardly and unmanly to do otherwise. And I am sure I have a great respect and admiration for her individually, and I cannot, for the life of me, see but what clear-

ing my father's memory from evil imputation must be doing the same by hers. Poor girl! I wonder if she will always be a governess? However, being in your family seems to agree with her," continued Reuben; "I never saw her looking so well as she does now."

"I am glad she is well and happy, for Hester Otway is a grand favourite with us all. You have never mentioned these family affairs to her?"

"No, never. I should have thought it most indelicate so to do, unless there were a real necessity—some crisis of affairs in which she was, in a measure, concerned."

"That is well," returned Mr. Freeth, "for I have reason to know that she is keenly sensitive on the subject of her father's disgrace. Moreover, if Otway be alive, I think she will hear of him some day or other."

"But how can he be alive?" persisted Reuben.

"Why, he would be barely sixty, and we have never verified his death. Why should he *not* be alive?"

"I only hope he may be. I only wish I knew he were still in the flesh, still able to recapitu-

late the evidence he gave at that terrible inquest."

"I wish so too," said Mr. Freeth. "However, let us return to your own immediate and personal plans. And suppose, this warm evening, we take our cigars to the balcony."

Has it been said that Telford House was an old-fashioned mansion, re-named when the Freeths took possession of it? The dining-room, which looked out on what, considering it was in London, really deserved to be called a garden, had the luxury of a verandah and balcony, from which the view was towards the river, and towards what were then still called the New Houses of Parliament. The moon was up by this time, and, nearly at the full, was more golden than silver. It made the lamps along the bridges, and along the low ground by the water's edge, look pale and poor as they shed their local lustre, for the moonlight flooded the heavens, and dropped some of its glory on the water, and yet had plenty to spare for arches and columns and all the traceries of Gothic fretwork. And, probably, the two rather matter-of-fact Englishmen noticed to them-

selves that it was a lovely night as they smoked their very good cigars, and made interjectional remarks between their whiffs. But, whether they knew it or not, their thoughts and feelings were influenced by the hour and the scene.

"Though I call myself a Liberal," said Mr. Freeth, "I am not much mixed up with politics, having far other things to engross me. And, now I come to think over people, I really believe I have friends of every shade of opinion. You, I know, are an old-fashioned Tory of the deepest dye."

"No, I don't think that; only a firm, consistent Conservative. I am satisfied that there will be a good many members of my way of thinking in the next Parliament; and the more I dwell on the idea, the more determined I am to try my chance."

"Well, my dear Reuben, I'll give you what introductions I can, and put you in the way of finding out who's who and what's what. With a little manoeuvring, I daresay you could get proposed for some place or other, without seeming over-anxious and solicitous."

"I hate manoeuvring. I want to find some

place where the constituents are not quite satisfied with their members, or where some one is retiring, and then offer myself manfully and in a straightforward way."

"Exactly so. You'll have to excuse me for the remainder of the evening, for I have some calculations to make that would keep me awake if I did not work them up out of my head, besides some letters to write; but I'll see what can be done the first thing after breakfast to-morrow. There are plenty of newspapers and magazines about the house; and the last 'Quarterly' and 'Edinburgh'—have you seen them?"

"Oh! I shall amuse myself very well; and you must not let me interrupt you the least in the world. Besides, what with walking and swimming before I left Singlebeach this morning, I am ready for a good dose of sleep, and shall be inclined to go to bed early."

"Well, then, good night, if I don't see you again. I'm going to ring for coffee in my study. Shall I order it for you now, or presently?"

"Oh! I'll have a cup now, and just look at

the Quarterlies, to see if there is anything in my way in them, and then to bed."

A "good dose of sleep" was an accustomed luxury with Reuben Appersley, though one only obtained by the "early-to-bed" system which prevailed at Five Oaks. But "early to rise" was a yet more persistent habit with him; therefore, though he did not realize his expectation of sleeping soundly, he was stirring long before the remembered breakfast hour. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to be kept wakeful by his busy thoughts; or was it the strong coffee, taken late in the evening, which made him restless? Yes, no doubt that was it, and he should avoid such a mistake in future. But Reuben had a great fund of perfect health from which to draw, and I am not sure that his faculties were not keener after that comparatively sleepless night than they would have been after many hours of heavy, unconscious slumber.

With the morning's light he could not help looking around Lionel's room, which he was occupying, and it might be excused if he speculated to himself a little about his brother-in-

law's position and pursuits. Lionel had not yet returned the money he had borrowed under such circumstances of mystery and secrecy; not that Reuben cared much about the five hundred pounds, though, just now, it would be acceptable enough; but he had a sort of elder-brotherly feeling toward Lionel, and hoped most ardently that he was not getting into any scrapes. Reuben had never for a moment fancied himself as intellectually gifted as he considered Lionel to be; moreover, he knew that he had not the same capacity for hard study; but Reuben, like a great many people who read but few books, and never pretend to literary taste, had a great deal of shrewd good sense, and it was a quality that had been very much developed lately. And, strange to say, without making him a happier man.

He loved his wife, his dear Catherine, as devotedly as ever; thought her as beautiful, admired her as absolutely, and saw no flaw in her mind or manners. And yet, growing up in his heart—though always crushed down as something he would not allow himself to recognise—was a sense of disappointment in his married

life. Sometimes he felt humiliated at his own pettiness, when he thought it must be her superiority which threw out an impalpable frost-work between them. Sometimes he thought it was a mistake not having provided a separate home for his mother, and yet all his filial feelings warmed against such a project. Besides, was not Catherine her own heart's desire for a daughter, though it could not be concealed that his mother loved authority, and that it was not Catherine who was mistress in the house. But Catherine never murmured at the small tyrannies which even he observed ; and the conclusion was that, in temper, Catherine was angelic.

Now it was this subdued self-questioning which had served to arouse Reuben's slumbering faculties, and the heart always teaches in great sections. Compared with the Reuben Appersley of last year, he was a man of the world now, relatively, I say, not absolutely. And this newly-acquired "man-of-the-world feeling" made him look round upon Lionel's belongings with inquiring interest.

Not that there was very much to notice. Just

now Lionel was understood to be making a tour in Germany with that intimate associate who had swum to his rescue when the boat upset; but I fancy that Lionel's rooms at Cambridge were far more crowded with personal properties than his room at home had ever been. It was a despised brace of pistols that Reuben noticed over the chimney-piece, and between them was a very different object. It was "Viola," as represented in a series of Shakesperian illustrations, published thirty or forty years ago, when a steel-engraving was a reality worthy to be called art. Not the theatrical Viola of tinsel and paint, with stage accessories, but a figure of ideal grace and loveliness. Reuben knew the series to which it belonged—had seen it more than once on a drawing-room table; yet, as he gazed now at the Viola, framed and glazed as if it were a real portrait, there seemed to him a freshness in it, a likeness to some one he knew, though, at the moment, he could not remember whom.

On the other side of the room was hung, in what might be called the second place of honour, a photograph of a young man, apparently about

two and twenty, but muscular for his age, dark-haired and thickly-whiskered. Photography was then in its infancy, and was even a more cruel limner than it is at present. Art, as yet, was only wooing it to be tender and gracious, or baldly truthful at the worst; and the tentative photographic portraits of that day generally reminded one of all we should desire to forget in a friend's face, and recalled not one beaming look of love or gladness. Therefore, it is not surprising that Reuben failed to admire the likeness in question; and yet, like many unpleasing things, it exercised a certain fascination over him. He could not help studying the countenance of this young man—handsome he undoubtedly must be; but the pitiless rays had revealed a look of keenness that had something animal in its intensity, and to which the intellectual powers were hardly allied. Not that there was either vacancy or stolidity in the face, but there were weak lines about the mouth; and though Reuben Appersley did not profess to have studied physiognomy, he felt instinctively that this was the likeness of a man who lived in the present mainly, unchilled by fear, unwarmed by

hope of consequences that lie in the future. He wondered what friend or acquaintance of Lionel's he could be, till, taking down the photograph to examine it more closely, he saw written at the back, "Cuthbert Rawlins."

"So this is the fellow who saved him from drowning," remembered Reuben, "and with whom he is travelling now. Well, I wish I liked his face better. But these new-fangled portraits are always horrid things."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BROWN OF LENNOX INN.

God gives to every man
 The virtue, temper, understanding, taste,
 That lifts him into life, and lets him fall
 Just in the niche he was ordain'd to fill.

COWPER.

MR. FREETH had sat up into the small hours, busy at his plans and calculations; nevertheless, he had found time to think over Reuben's affairs, and he came down to breakfast charged with the good intentions which had resulted from his cogitations.

"The first thing we do," said he, "after I have been round to the office for half an hour, shall be to drive to Lennox Inn. I ought to have thought of Smith and Brown last night,—

the lawyers, you may remember, to whom Lionel was articulated. Most respectable men, and I am on the best terms with them. Whenever Lionel is called to the bar, I look to them to put things in his way, for they know what is in him. However, that is not the question now, but what does concern you is that they are deep in election affairs, and always on your side in politics. I should not wonder if they are able at once to put you on the right track."

"I shall be delighted not to lose time," replied Reuben, "and, after what you have said, I shall feel in good hands."

Accordingly, before noon, Mr. Freeth and Reuben found themselves in a dingy doorway of Lennox Inn, where the name of the firm, once radiant in letters of white paint, was now but faintly visible through many successive layers of London smoke and dust. But Smith and Brown had too extensive a *clientèle* for the legibility of their names on the door-post to be of any consequence. The long vacation, however, had just begun, and the clerks were taking holidays by turns; thus the place altogether was quieter than usual, and very suggest-

ive of that semi-drowsiness which seems to pervade all business in the dead season. Moreover, Mr. Smith was out of town; but, after passing the due number of swinging doors, and awaiting the result of Hubert Freeth's card being despatched to an inner chamber, the two gentlemen were ushered through the clerks' office into Mr. Brown's sanctum, where they were received by that gentleman himself.

A spacious, well-furnished room it was, with Turkey carpet and solid mahogany writing-table, and morocco leather chairs to correspond, with the one easy-chair, placed with its back to the light, for the portly Mr. Brown's own occupation. A large glazed book-case stretched along one side of the room, and was surmounted by plaster busts of three eminent chancellors, while several fine engravings of other legal luminaries decorated the walls.

But, to the uninitiated, a trifle more order, a trifle less dirt, seemed wanting to make the room cheerful and comfortable. For the windows were semi-opaque for want of cleaning; there were cobwebs about the ceiling, and black dust lay thick upon bundles of papers

and parchments. Yet Mr. Brown himself—a man in the prime of life, and who had a charming villa at Highgate—looked “well groomed” and fresh of toilet, wearing well-cut, well-brushed, fine broadcloth, but without finery. His hat, which was on a side-table, was of genuine beaver; the gloves, which lay near it, were all but new; and a small looking-glass in the pier, well-dusted and bright, was probably consulted occasionally in all arrangements which required that sort of reflection.

Mr. Brown was the type of a certain class of successful men of the world. He meant well, and did well, but he never despised appearances, and never wore himself out with enthusiasms of any sort. His clear, rather steely grey eyes saw through the surface of things, yet measured, also, how much the mass of mankind are influenced by external impressions. But what, perhaps, astonished him more than anything else, was the amazing stupidity of certain sorts of wickedness—the chicanery and double-dealing which always meet discovery and disgrace sooner or later, and more often “sooner” than “later.”

A model lawyer this to steer Reuben Appersley safely among the shoals and quicksands of an election. And when Mr. Freeth had introduced his son-in-law, and explained his wishes, Mr. Brown entered into them with due professional ardour.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "I think I know the very thing that will suit you. There is the borough of Fordinghill; it always used to return two Conservatives till it got bitten by Liberalism. But their present Whig member, from all I hear—and I know the place well, having been on the committee of the Tory members more than once—their present member, Mr. Raybrooke, has very little chance of being re-elected."

"Mr. Raybrooke—Algernon Raybrooke? Oh, he is an acquaintance of mine, a young man I like very much," observed Mr. Freeth. "It would be odd enough if Mr. Appersley and he should be rival candidates."

"Why not?" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "There will certainly be two Conservatives to offer themselves, and your nephew may as well be one; but whether both candidates will be re-

turned, there is no saying. It will greatly depend upon the popularity of the other candidates. Votes may be split unluckily—our free and independent electors so often mismanage their affairs! As far as I know, you are at present first in the field.”

“I should think that a great point,” said Reuben.

“Yes; and I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll telegraph to my partner, who happens to be holiday-making within twenty miles of Fordinghill, get him to run over and sound some of the leading people—all in confidence, you know, till we see how the land lies—and you shall hear from me in two or three days.”

“I think myself fortunate to have enlisted your services,” said Reuben, with a sincerity that gave his words something more than the ring of politeness; “and I shall hold myself in readiness to go to Fordinghill and canvass in person, if you recommend such a step.”

“It may be highly desirable to do so without delay,” returned Mr. Brown. “At any rate, I will communicate with you directly I hear from Mr. Smith. But, stay, you shall see and

approve my telegram." So saying, he turned to his desk, and drew out the following message :

"Find out what chance for the Conservatives at Fordinghill. Young man of independent property offers. New to Parliament. Likely to be good for the borough. Answer."

"I would try to do my duty," said Reuben, as he handed back the paper. "I feel you have expressed my wish very kindly."

"Oh, the Fordinghill people are worth conciliating; a little old-fashioned, it may be," observed Mr. Brown, "but none the worse for that, in my opinion."

"All the better Tories, probably," cried Hubert Freeth, laughing. "Upon my word, I feel amused at myself," he continued, "playing into the enemy's hands in this manner. And I shall be downright sorry if Algernon Raybrooke is not returned somewhere. I really don't think he deserves to be unseated for Fordinghill. I know something of its affairs, and have reason to believe that he has served his constituents very faithfully with regard to their local interests."

"Ah! but they may not fancy so; there are two opinions on that subject, I assure you," exclaimed Mr. Brown, "though yours may be the right one, and the fault-finders may be only those who do not know their best interests. However, Mr. Raybrooke is one of our rising young men, and will be sure to be returned somewhere or another. How I wish he were on the right side!—how we would work to bring you both in!" And Mr. Brown rubbed his white hands gently together, with a gesture as of lavation—a gesture in which he was apt to indulge when pleased with a fact or an idea.

The visitors soon afterwards departed, well contented with their reception, the candidate for Parliamentary honours feeling that, though the Rubicon was not already exactly passed, he had, at any rate, made a plunge into it.

By the next post, Reuben wrote to both his wife and his mother, apprizing them of his intentions; and to Catherine he suggested that, if she really wished to come and see her father, now would be the best time, especially as he felt he must himself remain in town for a few

days. He even named a certain train, saying that he would be at the terminus the next day with the chance of meeting her.

Of course she came; and either the sea-air had already done her good, or the excitement of the journey and of Reuben's news had been pleasant, for she looked so well and blooming that Mr. Freeth could not understand what her mother meant by being anxious about her. In his letter Reuben had not gone into particulars—had not even named Fordinghill; had only mentioned that there was a certain borough spoken of, and that he was waiting for further instructions from Messrs. Smith and Brown.

How these names and Lennox Inn recalled the days when Lionel rose early and studied late, working with the ardour of ambitious youth, and no little of the energy of a self-reliant man, to acquire law and make himself a position! Looking back at that time, Catherine fancied that everyone about her then was happy and high-spirited, and able to fling back care, as one shakes off a snow-flake. Now there seemed a dull disquiet in so many of the family. Certainly, she was pleased that Reuben was

stirring himself to a life of energy and usefulness, though she wished his political creed had been broader ; but, after all, the breezes and sunshine of Shinglebeach had really tinged her cheeks, and deserved the chief credit for her improved looks.

Catherine had not travelled quite alone. As Burton had nearly completed her turn at the seaside, and was now wanted at the town house, she returned to London at the same time, deputing herself to be Mrs. Reuben Appersley's personal attendant. Burton wished to ingratiate herself,—wished to put herself in favourable comparison with the “inefficient and insufferable” young person who was Catherine's own maid, and who had evidently not been thought of importance enough to be taken to Shinglebeach ; the truth being that the elder Mrs. Appersley had “strongly advised” her being left at home, having plans and projects with regard to needlework that she wished executed in Catherine's absence.

Hubert Freeth rejoiced to see his daughter look so blooming, and she could fairly congratulate him on his appearance. He seemed to have

recovered from all the annoyances of last Winter, and was full of schemes for the future.

"I must go to Switzerland," he observed the day after Catherine's arrival. "I must make the geological survey for myself, and it is the only time of the year that I can get away. I suppose the general election will be all over before I return."

"How I wish it were over!" said Catherine with a smile.

"Do you mean to canvass for your husband?" asked Mr. Freeth good-humouredly.

"I?" exclaimed Catherine with sudden surprise.

"Well, my Kate, I do not quite fancy you in the part of a lady canvasser," replied her father; "I was but jesting, my dear. Besides, the beautiful duchess who set the example in a past generation was a Whig partisan, and you must be converted to rank Toryism if you are to help Reuben."

"I wish Reuben would convert me," said Catherine, smiling, and laying her hand on the table near Reuben's fingers, which were just then coquetting with a paper-knife. "I am sure

I should like, beyond everything, to think precisely as he does."

Reuben took the hand placed so invitingly near, and pressed it lovingly, holding it while he went on talking.

"I wish I could convert you," he said; "but I am afraid you are very ready with objections to my opinions. Yet what does it signify? Women cannot understand politics—how should they?—though I own they are quick enough in finding weak points in an argument."

"You know, Reuben, I never talk politics unless you lead me to the subject."

"Not with my mother?" said Reuben, laughing.

"Only when she introduces something of the sort, and I cannot be silent and sulky; and I must speak the truth as I see it. Besides, I think women may talk politics together. What I meant was, I never venture on the subject with gentlemen, or in general society. I perfectly agree with you, that women have not the opportunity of knowing and judging of any branch of knowledge in the same way that men have. With us, as it has well been said, 'the pursuit of knowledge' is always 'under difficul-

ties.' Only, I think, in questions of plain right and wrong, and truth and justice, we must have an opinion of our own, and ought to be allowed to express it."

"I declare! quite a clever little speech," replied Reuben, and he gave Catherine's hand a kiss before he released it; "but, for all that, I believe you have some strong, steady opinions of your own. So has my mother, for that matter; and I, being half way between her ultra-Toryism and your Liberalism, can agree with either more nearly than you can agree with one another; and Kitty, if you like to take the credit, I believe you have toned me down a little."

"Why, I never thought anything I said or read to you made the least impression."

"Ah, but it often has, though. Still I consider myself a staunch Conservative, far firmer in my views than many of those who take the name. But I have little hope of converting you; and I fancy, when we come to the hustings, you'll be more interested in Mr. Raybrooke's promises than mine."

"Mr. Raybrooke," murmured Catherine, who

was taken by surprise, and hardly able to conjecture what was meant.

"Yes, Mr. Algernon Raybrooke, one of the present members for Fordinghill, whom I am to displace, if possible. But how white you have turned! what on earth have I said, my dear love, to distress you?"

"Nothing, nothing; it is only a momentary feeling; I have had it before now. And do go on; I should like to hear everything you have to tell me."

"My love, there is nothing to tell till we hear from Smith and Brown."

"I think it is time for me to write to mamma," observed Catherine, "if I am to save this post; and then I must dress. You know, I suppose, that Mrs. Brindley has heard of my being in town; and that papa has asked her and Aline to dinner. They are going to Shinglebeach next week, to stay a little time with mamma."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME CHIT-CHAT DISCUSSION.

We see but half the causes of our deeds,
 Seeking them wholly in the outer life,
 And heedless of the encircling spirit-world,
 Which, though unseen, is felt, and sows in us
 All germs of pure and world-wide purposes.

LOWELL.

REUBEN APPERSLEY was not kept long in suspense. Before dinner was announced, a special messenger arrived from Smith and Brown, with a letter intimating that Ford-ingham was decidedly ready to be wooed by a Conservative candidate, and recommending that Mr. Appersley should present himself in the borough with as little delay as possible. Mr. Smith was still there, and purposed remaining for a few days in the neighbourhood, that he

might receive Mr. Appersley, introduce him to some of the influential townspeople, and organize a committee. The whole thing was, therefore, well in train.

Mrs. Brindley was considered so completely the "friend of the family" that neither her presence nor that of Aline was any restraint on the discussion of Reuben's affairs. Indeed, she entered warmly into his views, and gave his intentions the weight of her hearty approval.

"I am so delighted!" she exclaimed; "if only that dear Mrs. Reuben will then live in London a good part of the year, and be one of us again."

"Yes," said Mr. Freeth, "we shall all like to have her in the season. The last time I saw Lady Hartrington she was lamenting over Catherine's exile from society, as she called it. Lady Hartrington is not narrow in her views—quite the reverse, still, knowing as she does the best people, she has the feminine weakness of fancying that those who are out of her set are out of the world."

"How is Lady Hartrington?" asked Catherine. "I used to like her so much!"

"Oh, she was quite well a month ago, and Sir Jasper, too, considering his age. They are somewhere on the Continent for the Autumn, like so many other people just now. Brilliant woman of the world as she is, I fancy she is a very devoted wife, and watches over his health most tenderly."

"I could believe anything good of Lady Hartrington," returned Catherine, with enthusiasm—"she is quite my ideal; if I thought I should live to be as old, I should try to be like her."

"It is well my mother does not hear you," said Reuben, with a laugh.

"I know that, Reuben," replied Catherine, "and I should not have spoken so frankly in her presence. She would have caught me up with a little scold, and asked what fancies I had about dying, and then objected to my ideal, and set up her own. Only, dear Reuben, when she is not present I do not see why I should crush my enthusiasm."

"My love," replied Reuben, "I spoke more in mirth than anything else. I love to see you

animated, and, upon my word, I think London air agrees with your spirits."

This little dialogue was a sort of revelation to more than one of the party. Hubert Freeth turned uneasily on his chair as the conviction flashed upon his mind that Catherine, his darling, was not so supremely happy and ineffably contented as, in his masculine ignorance of woman's nature, he had supposed her to be. A certain love of freedom was with him a passion, and though he had his own notions of man's supremacy, he had not the least tolerance for one woman domineering over another—no, not even a husband's mother, and that husband's mother his own sister. Indeed, there awoke in him lively recollections of his own early days, when the elder sister's self-will and persistent dominion were to him more intolerable than any other control. He reproached himself for stupidity in not having stipulated at the time of Catherine's marriage that she should have a separate home and establishment, and, of course, he felt more than ever rejoiced at a scheme which might release his daughter even occasionally and temporarily from thralldom.

Mrs. Brindley, with a woman's shrewdness—though without turning in her chair—comprehended something of Catherine's position, and secretly gave her just as much tranquil sympathy as her knowledge of circumstances and her character would permit. She thought, too, that it was a great mistake to treat married people like children, however young and amiable they might be; and that if Reuben Appersley were a dozen years older there would be more consequence attached to his wife. She would have liked to see anyone attempt to "catch her up" in her speech "with a little scold" when the poor dear major was alive—or rather, she would *not* have liked to answer for the result of such an impertinence.

As for Aline Brindley, she only thought that the elder Mrs. Appersley must be rather a disagreeable personage, and admired Catherine for her evident gentleness and consideration towards her husband's mother.

Meanwhile, Catherine herself was quite unconscious that her words had made any deep impression. She had accepted her lot with its shimmering outside of prosperity and apparent con-

tent, its hidden disappointments and petty annoyances. But she was honestly striving to make the best of every circumstance, to stifle unavailing regrets, which had an unclean horror when they arose, to compare her own tenderly guarded existence with the tangible sorrows and hard struggles of multitudes of young women who, like Hester Otway, had to battle with the world; and, in short, to snatch from the life of each day whatever good it presented. It is so natural to be buoyant of spirits in youth, that, except for some terrible cause, she felt it almost sinful not to be happy; and it was from the buoyant feeling of the moment she had spoken. As yet, the world was only partially unmasked to Catherine. She thought her own hidden sorrows quite special, and believed that such a life as Lady Hartrington's must be so rounded and complete that there was no loophole in it for trouble to enter. To be the wife of a man distinguished as Sir Jasper through life had been, and herself the idol of a brilliant, intellectual circle, did seem to poor Catherine the acme of human felicity.

There had been a short pause after Reuben's

last words, and it was Mrs. Brindley who took up the ball of conversation, saying to Catherine :

“If you should stay in town next Spring, I shall ask you to be *chaperon* to Aline sometimes.”

“I should be delighted to be of use,” said Catherine, “if you think I am really old enough for such a *rôle*.”

“You are married—that is quite enough,” returned Mrs. Brindley. “Not that I mean to shrink from my own duties altogether, and dear Mrs. Freeth will help me, I know, in giving Aline a fair start in the world.”

Aline’s cheek flushed at finding herself thus the subject of conversation, and Catherine, sympathizing with her feelings, tried, with delicate tact, to relieve her embarrassment.

“This going into society,” she exclaimed, “is always at first more or less of an ordeal; but, dear Aline, the plunge will not be so sudden with you as it was with me, and I assure you, parties at good houses, where one meets clever people, are very enjoyable. And when you are under my wing, I shall take care only to visit pleasant people.”

Aline thanked Catherine with a smile, and

the look exchanged across the table showed a good understanding between them. Reuben also caught the look, and, in doing so, discovered that it was Aline Brindley who resembled the ideal Viola which he had found suspended over Lionel's mantel-piece.

"There is one thing I should like to ask your advice about," continued Mrs. Brindley, with some seriousness, "for I have not, by any means, made up my mind; that is, whether Aline should be presented next year. It is true, I never myself had that honour. At the time of my marriage, Major Brindley did not care about it, nor did I. Still, as his daughter, Aline has every right to the distinction. Such a thing is always an advantage to a young person—don't you think so? And we might be presented together."

"Decidedly, it would be an advantage socially," replied Hubert Freeth; "and if my wife had been less shy, and more inclined to such a proceeding, I should have urged her to it last year. I am sure it could easily have been managed; but she shrank from the idea as inconsistent with her position."

"There I don't agree with Mrs. Freeth," said Mrs. Brindley, "but, after all, perhaps the pleasure and honour would hardly have been worth the fatigue and excitement. Her position, even without going to Court, is well secured, and is very much to be envied, in my opinion."

Hubert Freeth made a low bow with mock gravity, as the most becoming return for such an implied compliment.

"And, surely, when Mr. Appersley is in Parliament *you* would like to be presented," said Mrs. Brindley, addressing Catherine.

"I really had not thought of such a thing," she replied; "and, indeed, I don't see that it would be necessary."

"Oh, but so many things are pleasant and prudent that cannot be called necessary," returned Mrs. Brindley.

"But I am not in Parliament yet—perhaps never may be," interposed Reuben.

"Oh, yes, you will be, I am sure of it," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley; "if not for Fordinghill, some other place will want you. But I think you will be returned for Fordinghill. Smith and Brown are wide-awake people, who would

not be sanguine without reason. I have the highest opinion of them."

"You know them, then?" said Mr. Freeth.

"Yes; don't you recollect a little business that your son conducted for me in their office?"

"I think I do," cried Mr. Freeth; "when we were in the old house and Lionel was articled to them, and very often he had papers to take round to you, in the evening—oh, yes, I remember."

"How is Lionel?" inquired Mrs. Brindley. "I have not heard of him for a long time."

"Oh, I suppose he is quite well; at Baden-Baden, I believe, just now," said Mr. Freeth. "Extravagant dog," he added; "if I had known his great capacity for acquiring expensive habits, I might have thought twice before sending him to college."

This implied censure was very mild, and delivered quite good-humouredly. Yet the time had been when Catherine, and even Reuben, would have found some ready defence of the absent brother. Now they were silent, and it was Mrs. Brindley who said,

"Ah, we cannot put old heads upon young shoulders."

"I should be very sorry if we could," replied Hubert Freeth with a laugh; "with the present selfish, short-sighted stupidity of the world things would be even in uglier confusion than they are. No, I cannot like riveted china, though the pieces match, much less when they don't; and the errors of the heart would be inexcusable if the head were twenty years in advance in experience."

"A very pretty defence of the young, upon my word," replied Mrs. Brindley, gayly. "Aline, you are the youngest of the party, and ought to acknowledge it."

But Aline coloured, and was altogether too shy to have any suitable words ready. This little speech of her mother's was something like touching a sensitive plant, and then expecting it to be steady. Mr. Freeth, however, seemed well enough inclined to go on talking about his eldest son, and resumed the subject by saying:

"I wish, if any of you see Lionel while I am away, you would find out what he really is doing. He ought to have made more way than

he has before this vacation. I know very well what his abilities are, and how easily he can make up for lost time if he pleases; but still there is moderation in all things. It is not so much the money I care about,—though, really, the long pull, and the strong pull, and the pull altogether, of a large family on the purse is something startling,—but what I feel is that money and time are spent together. All this boating and riding, and driving and rushing about the country, whenever there was a day or half a day to be snatched from the round of study, seems to me a sad waste of time, and so I told him the other day. I don't apologize for saying all this to Mrs. Brindley, because she is a sort of second mamma in the family."

"And, in that capacity," replied the lady, "I give you notice that I shall always take Lionel's part. When in Rome, you must do as Rome does—that was the old saying; and if Lionel's friends are mostly young men of fortune, how can he help spending money?"

"Again I say, there is moderation in all things, and that time and money go together."

"But remember, 'all work and no play,' that is said to make a dull boy, is it not?" cried Mrs. Brindley, who seemed to-day to be airing some musty proverbs.

"Yes, my dear lady, but 'all play and no work' is, to my mind, a still more deteriorating process. However, I don't mean to say that Li has not read and worked hard,—I am pretty sure that he has; but I don't want him to acquire a love of pleasure, which has ruined more lives, so far as I have observed, than any one other cause."

"Who is the Mr. Cuthbert Rawlins that Catherine has told me about?" inquired Reuben. "The friend who jumped into the river after Lionel when his boat upset, was he not?"

"Yes; young Rawlins is his great chum. A young man of good family and great expectations, I believe. I think Lionel told me that Rawlins' friends hoped he would take honours, and wished for him a diplomatic career. And now the two are knocking about somewhere together at the German baths—there is not much chance of Lionel reading up this vacation, I fear."

"Baden-Baden, I think you said," observed Reuben.

"I suppose so; that, at any rate, was last week's postmark. And he said in his letter that he had some good reasons for somewhat prolonging his stay there. Well," continued Mr. Freeth, "I suppose this is the last evening we shall have together for ages. If you go down to Fordinghill to-morrow what about Catherine?"

"Oh! I shall not ask her to go with me on what may be called this trial-trip; though I should like her to be with me at the time of the election. But I will not take her now."

"Why not?" said Catherine.

"Would you really like to go?" asked Reuben, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Catherine; "because we might afterwards return to Shinglebeach together for a few days."

"I hardly think I could spare the time, I see before me so much to do. And when you were so near home, it would seem foolish to come back again—at least, my mother would think so."

"Let Kate do as she likes," cried Mr. Freeth, who would rather not have heard this allusion to Reuben's mother. "What do you say about going off to Switzerland with me?" he said, addressing his daughter. "I will take you, if you care to go, and your husband will spare you."

"Oh! no, no, thank you, dear papa. I will go back for another week to Shinglebeach, as I promised mamma; that will be the best plan. And then, before I leave, Mrs. Brindley and Aline will be arriving, so she will not be without company."

"It is so kind of her to have us," said Mrs. Brindley.

"It is very kind of you to give my wife your company," replied Mr. Freeth; "and she knows she has *carte blanche* to stay at Shinglebeach as long as she likes."

Though Mrs. Brindley thought Shinglebeach a wretched place, the proposed visit there fell in well with her private plans; for an autumnal "change of air," on her own account, must have cost money, and she was just now

rigidly economizing, in preparation for probable Court dresses, and other expenses which would be associated with Aline's "coming out."

CHAPTER IX.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

All common things, each day's events,
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend.

LONGFELLOW.

REUBEN APPERSLEY arrived at Fordinghill about the middle of the next day. He knew the place very well, having often spent an hour or two there when making cross-country journeys; but, accustomed as he was to consideration in his own immediate neighbourhood, he was not prepared to find himself so well known on the borders of another county as now he proved to be. Perhaps Mr. Smith had judiciously paved the way for him; perhaps it

was a fact that the young Squire of Five Oaks had really a good repute, which had extended even far beyond Meadshire.

Certainly he was received by the Conservative party with open arms, pronounced to be the right man in the right place, his return as good as pledged by an influential section of the townspeople, his health drunk freely at various taverns to the landlord's evident satisfaction, and the detriment of somebody's purse, and perhaps of the condition of the drinkers,—for there were tipsy men in the streets that night who shouted their laudable opinions about Church and State, and Queen and Commons, so vociferously that, for their health's sake, it was thought best to put them under lock and key till the morning.

Of course he stayed two or three days at the place, improving his acquaintance with the people, and hearing Mr. Raybrooke occasionally reviled as a mere dreamer and talker, who had shamefully betrayed the local interests of the borough he represented.

Meanwhile, Catherine had returned to Shinglebeach, taking her dear old nurse, Janet Gillespie, *vice* Hannah Burton, with her; Mr. Freeth

reading "Locksley Hall," and thinking that the lightly-rolling waves made a music which was fit accompaniment to the beat of the poem; dreaming, too, on her own account, many a vague and airy dream, as, with untroubled heart, she gave her fanciful imagination full play. Then she had felt, or thought she had felt, that her mother did not understand such reveries, and did not feast at her own intellectual banquets. But now Catherine was conscious that she had passed to another form in the great school of life, and though she could still more keenly taste the luscious sweet, the tonic bitter, and the fiery alcohol of the poem which had so stirred her, she could also see, with a clearer vision, the poetry of her mother's life.

Something of these feelings she attempted to express one day. The two were sitting by the sea, where Catherine had been reading to her mother, but rather in a fragmentary manner, for the book did not fascinate. It had been recommended by the librarian, and had recommended itself because it was clean—rare merit in a sea-side library-book—but its dulness accounted for the wholesome freshness of its

leaves. And so, after moderate perseverance, the reading ceased, and they fell into the old accustomed chat about familiar things and close interests. It should be known that Mrs. Freeth was deeply interested in Reuben's Parliamentary project, though a little startled—one might almost say frightened—at the prominent part he was likely to take in the world.

“Oh! Catherine,” she had exclaimed, “what a much more important position yours is than mine was at your age!”

“Nay, mamma,” returned Catherine; “I don't think so. You were a mother at twenty as well as a wife. And now that I am married myself, and see what a wife's cares and duties are, I am better able than I used to be to understand what a noble life yours has been.”

“My love, what can you mean? I see nothing in my life but trying to do my duty as well as I was able.”

“And is not that all that the best and greatest on earth are able to do? You and dear papa managed somehow or other to give me education; though really, when I remember what your income was, and see how money

melts away, I cannot imagine how you paid my school bills and masters ; however, I did learn a few things, and have read a few books, but I feel quite sure that I am not nearly so good or wise a woman as you are."

"My darling, do not talk in this way, pray," and Mrs. Freeth was so far moved that the tears glistened in her eyes. But she wore a large shade, which concealed the upper part of her face.

"Why should I not say what is the simple truth?" continued Catherine. "I so enjoy society, so need variety—I like so much what I am afraid can only be called pleasure, that I never could, year after year, have led the homely, monotonous life you did—at any rate, I could not have done so with your cheerful, contented spirit—that is what I mean."

"But, my dear, there was no merit ; I was so happy through the years you mean."

"That you were happy is the merit, I think."

"How could I be otherwise ? The marriage of your father and me was quite a love-match, and though we had only known each other six months when we were engaged, I don't believe

we could have been more attached even if we had been cousins like you and Reuben."

"That I can well believe," said the daughter; "and now that I am beginning to see a little of the world, I am able, as I said before, to better appreciate what a wife and mother you have been. I sometimes wish that I knew how to take a leaf out of your book, as goody-goody people say." And Catherine heaved a little sigh, and drew a figure of eight among the pebbles with the point of her parasol.

"Do you know, Catherine, you are making me quite uneasy with these remarks?" said Mrs. Freeth; and then she added, as if from a sudden dread, "Surely you and Reuben don't quarrel?"

"Oh, no, we don't quarrel—I assure you we don't. Reuben has never said an unkind word to me. What could have made you think of such a thing? And why should you be uneasy, dear mamma, at anything I have said?"

"That is just what I don't know! But I am very thankful you are so happy."

"Did you ever consider me of a thankless dis-

position, mamma?" asked Catherine, after a little pause.

"No, my dear, never. What a question!"

"I am glad of that, because I should like to know myself, if I can. I do very often count up the blessings I enjoy, and yet sometimes I am angry with myself for not feeling more grateful than I do. I wish, dear mamma," she continued, as if from a sudden impulse, "you would go back to Five Oaks with me; then I am sure I should feel grateful."

"Oh, Catherine, what an idea! How could I leave the children?"

"Most easily. If I know Mrs. Brindley at all, she would be delighted to take charge of everything and everybody."

"I dare say she would," said Mrs. Freeth,

"And there is Hester Otway, also, to depend upon," continued Catherine.

"Oh, I have promised to spare Miss Otway shortly, to visit her friends in Yorkshire."

"It would be a capital opportunity for the girls to take holiday when they had Aline for a companion."

"Upon my word, Catherine, now that you

have put the idea into my head, I feel tempted to think it over. But what will Reuben and his mother say?"

"They will be delighted. Whatever Aunt Appersley's faults may be, want of hospitality is not one of them; this I must in candour own, though I am not prepared to defend all she says and does."

"She always had a temper, but I thought she never showed it to you."

"Did you? But temper is a thing that shows itself in so many curious ways. One thing I can answer for, and that is, that she will be very kind and amiable to you."

"Why are you sure?"

"Oh, I could give you several reasons," replied Catherine with a little laugh. "In the first place, because she has not seen you for a very long time; in the second, because you are the mother of grown-up children, and just now she considers them a sorely oppressed class, deserving high consideration and much sympathy; besides which, she has got a scapegoat, and her temper is of the kind which only requires one scapegoat at a time."

"And who is the scapegoat?" asked Mrs. Freeth.

"I must not tell," replied Catherine, "it would not be fair."

"Not fair to whom?"

"To either party. Not fair to Aunt Appersley, and not fair to the scapegoat. Do you know," continued Catherine, turning, though not exactly changing the subject, "I fancy poor Hester was, for a good many years, a sort of scapegoat, though happily unconscious of the part she was performing. But aunt does not seem to hate her half so much as she used to do."

"That is because Reuben is married to you. Three years ago she was dreadfully frightened lest Reuben should fall in love with Hester—that was the reason of her hatred; now that her fear is removed, she can afford to be just. I do not believe there was any reason for her to take up such a fancy, but take it up she did. I should not in the least wonder, though, if Miss Otway were to marry extremely well, and she deserves any sort of good fortune. I will tell you, too, a little secret, though indeed Mrs. Brindley and

so many people know it that it can hardly be called a secret."

And then Mrs. Freeth related, in a tolerably succinct manner, the incident of the mysterious present of bank-notes.

Catherine listened with interest, and when the little story was finished, she exclaimed :

"I should like to tell Reuben ; indeed, I think I must ; he would be interested in the occurrence, I am sure. It is so evident what papa thinks, and Reuben would be so glad to believe that Hester's father is alive."

"Of course you can tell Reuben ; I should not think of asking you to keep anything from him. But I don't think it necessary to tell Mrs. Appersley ; perhaps Miss Otway might not like it."

"I will ask Reuben not to mention it to his mother," replied the daughter.

"I wish, Kate, you would tell me who is the scapegoat," said Mrs. Freeth, after a short pause.

"No," repeated Catherine, shaking her head ;
"no, it would not be fair."

"I think I shall accept your invitation, Cath-

erine, and go with you, or follow you home. As you say, Mrs. Brindley will no doubt be very willing to take my place, either here or in London, while your father is away."

"I am so delighted," exclaimed Catherine, and her whole manner testified to her pleasure; "and I really believe the second change of air will be of great service, and set you up for the Winter. I believe one gets all the good that is to be got from the sea in the first few weeks; you said so yourself last year. And Meadshire is not half so glaring for your poor dear eyes as the white cliffs and white houses here, and I know aunt will set herself to make you well, and be on all manner of 'hospitable thoughts intent.' The fowls will be requested to lay their finest eggs, and the cows to produce their richest cream—"

"Catherine," interrupted her mother, "I thought you were to be my hostess."

"Yes, oh, yes, of course I am; though Aunty is not one quite to give up the reins. Besides—though she might not have been sorry for an excuse to continue manager—she soon found out that I was not—was not what she calls domestic."

"But, Kate, is that really the case?" said Mrs. Freeth, gravely.

"Perhaps it is—I am not sure that I know. Sometimes I think I could manage a house if I tried, but I like so many things better than managing, that I have no objection whatever to letting Aunt Appersley rule in that sphere. Whatever my shortcomings, I think she feels that I am humble where housekeeping is concerned."

"Managing a country house must be something quite different from managing a London one," observed Mrs. Freeth.

"Quite different, and with different results, too, as you will see. Oh, mamma," she continued, "I am so delighted at your promise, and feel quite ready to say good-bye to poor dear Shinglebeach, since you will go home with me. I wonder, though, if we shall ever come here again?"

"You felt the same wonder last year, I remember," said Mrs. Freeth; "and we find ourselves in our old place on the beach. I have left off attempting to dive into the future, things

generally turn out so differently from what one has expected."

Before the week was out Mrs. Brindley had arrived, and had acceded to her friend's proposal; and before the day fixed on for Catherine and Mrs. Freeth to leave Shinglebeach, letters had been received from Reuben and his mother, expressing their satisfaction at the expected visit, and one from Mr. Freeth, approving warmly of his family being left under Mrs. Brindley's care; "another obligation," he said, "for which they could never make amends to their inestimable friend." The project seemed to have the rare merit of pleasing everyone concerned.

"There is but one drawback," said Mrs. Freeth, when all the arrangements seemed made; "I have never yet been separated a day from little Lucy. Poor darling, she is sure to fret after mamma."

"But cannot we take her with us?" said Catherine.

"I did once think of that, and yet there is a difficulty about her nurse. The child is so good that I do believe her aunt would be pleased to

have her, but she might not like a strange servant introduced. Besides, for the last year Lucy's nurse has helped with the other children—I don't see how they could do without her."

"I know—I know what we might do," cried Catherine. "It is not as if Lucy were a child in arms; I am sure Janet could take care of her; let us ask her to go with us, and leave the nurse behind."

"Oh! that would be delightful," returned Mrs. Freeth; "and I believe Janet would be pleased beyond measure."

And so she was, and thus the circle of pleasure seemed complete. For Hester Otway was to pay her visit to Yorkshire shortly, and Phoebe and Jane, and Gilbert and Teddy, would have no regrets at being left under the kind care of the "second mamma."

CHAPTER X.

ELECTIONEERING.

If that thee hap to come into our shire,
All shall be thine, right as thou wilt desire.

CHAUCEER.

A SHARP barking of dogs as the carriage passed through the outer gate was the first greeting of Catherine, when with her little party she reached home. It was a chilly evening early in September; there had been a good deal of rain in the course of the day, and as they passed down the avenue, the trees looked cold and wet, and to the fanciful imagination as if they were weeping for the Summer gone, and the wealth of golden leaves at their feet. The hour was just after sunset, but there was no

moon, and the clouds—dull, dirty-looking clouds, just faintly tinged with colour in the far west—hung low, without a star as yet having made a rent in their dark fleeces.

“The dear dogs,” exclaimed Catherine, “how I love their honest, cheerful voices!” And even as she spoke two or three great dogs bounded down the avenue, making wild leaps in joyful recognition of her, and showing off about the carriage all the antics of canine retainers.

Flickering light, suggestive of good fires, gleamed from several windows, and long before the little party reached the house the hall-door was thrown wide open, and Reuben Appersley, preceded by Floss, hastened forward to meet and greet them. Reuben was delighted to have Catherine at home again, and delighted that she had brought her mother with her as guest. Mrs. Appersley seemed not less pleased, and very soon took little Lucy from Janet's hand, and devoted herself to making the child happy and at home. Not, however, to the neglect of Mrs. Freeth, whom she had welcomed with cordiality. She shook hands with Janet Gillespie, who curtsied “lowly and reverently,” with the old-

fashioned grace now so rarely seen, and she gave Catherine a quick kiss, saying,

“If you had come by an earlier train, you would not have had half so cold a drive.”

And, meanwhile, Floss trembled with delight and agitation. Floss had not capered as much, or barked as loud, as the other dogs had done; but, indulging in little leaps, she had kept close by Catherine's side, content with a quiet pat on the head, which she returned by a dart of her tongue above the gloved hand, where a morsel of wrist was exposed. The dog's love for Catherine had always been excessive and exclusive, and she often applied to herself and Floss Mrs. Browning's description of a similar attachment:—

“And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again,
Than dogs often take of men,
Leaning from my human.”

It is even a fact that Floss was a real comfort and strength to her; it was as if the creature had a mute understanding of her moods, and

always, with sympathetic emotion, behaved in accordance with them. And they who rail at such an attachment should hush their voices, for they are like the colour-blind discoursing of the rainbow. It may be that there is a mystery in dog-love which philosophy will never fathom, and to which only the heart can respond.

According to Mrs. Appersley's favourite arrangement for expected guests, a miscellaneous meal was prepared—a meal half dinner, half tea, and wholly supper—in the long room already described as the ordinary family sitting-room. In a playful mood Catherine had once called this apartment the "Salle of the Golden Cup," for the racing cup on its stand beneath the picture of its winner was always a striking object; but somehow the name did not cling, and now, I think, had she been asked to designate the long parlour, she would have called it the "Room of the Battling Deer," for the strong, inextricably interwoven horny branches above the chimney-piece had impressed her imagination till they were to her like an unspoken language, in which every line symbolised strife.

Years had passed since Mrs. Freeth had

visited Five Oaks, but she had old and pleasant recollections of the place.

"I declare it seems but the other day," she exclaimed, when the first salutations were over, "that Catherine was the baby pet, to be coaxed away from Janet just as Lucy is now."

"Ah! time works wonderful changes," replied Mrs. Appersley, and the truism was delivered with a sigh.

"Of course it does," cried Reuben, who latterly had got into the habit of trying to stifle his mother's little sighs with mirth. "You would not have the world stand still, and pretty little girls never grow up into handsome women!"

"Reuben, how ridiculous you are!"

"Am I? But, mother, don't hint at such a fact to any of the Fordinghill people, or they'll refuse their votes." At which retort his mother smiled—it was not her way to really laugh at anything.

It was very well to make a jest of the Fordinghill people, but Catherine was of course anxious to learn more particulars of her husband's canvassing than he had been able to convey by letter; and, as he had nothing but

good and hopeful news to give her, the subject was very freely discussed. It appeared that the election was to take place within the next fortnight, and Catherine was instructed to be lavish in her expenditure on red ribbons—Reuben's colour—and their bestowal in the household.

To buy the red ribbons, to select a crimson shawl, and to order white bonnets, ornamented with floral mysteries of the suitable colour, formed ample excuse for more than one drive into Fordinghill. The youngest lady of the trio who went shopping, was soon identified as the wife of the new candidate, and her natural gift of making friends rendered her, though unconsciously, a very successful canvasser.

Mrs. Appersley was nervously anxious, though she restrained the exhibition of her feelings. The only drawback to her pleasure, and to her approval of her son's purpose, was the doubt of his success, which would linger in her mind, for her pride was of that sort which feels any defeat a humiliation. She determined to be present at his nomination, and to hear him speak for himself. There was nothing new to her in election scenes. She had lived for nearly thirty

years in Meadshire, and had often taken interest in the Fordinghill politics; but to Catherine everything was strange. She had been a child at the last general election, and the whole world of English parliamentary struggle dwelt in her mind with ill-defined outlines, such as school-books convey. But now she feels herself drawn into the vortex, and taking part in the contest. She too will hear Reuben address the electors; and since mother and wife were to listen, it seemed natural that Mrs. Freeth should also be present.

Catherine knew perfectly well that her husband would not be the only speaker whom she must hear. But the whole affair of the election had come upon her suddenly, and she seemed passing through it as if day by day she were impelled to act by an unseen force. Perfectly well she knew that at this nomination she should see and hear Algernon Raybrooke, whom she had not met since the night of the children's party just before her marriage, for of course the rival candidate would expound his views from the platform. Since she knew they must meet some day or other, perhaps the sooner the

ordeal was over the better ; and the opportunity was a favourable one, for she might by chance see and hear without being recognised by him.

In admitting to her own heart that the meeting must have about it the touch of an ordeal, she had not a thought or emotion that was disloyal to her husband. But Catherine had probed her own heart too deeply not to know its secrets ; and she could not hide from herself that Algernon Raybrooke had been an influence that shaped all her inner life. He had awakened in her soul a consciousness of possibilities which in this world could now never be realised for her.

Multitudes of women marry and rear children, lead busy, useful lives, and have laudatory epitaphs chiselled on their tombstones, who not only have never tasted the Paradisiacal joys of a perfect mutual love, but because they have never had its glory shown to them for a moment—have lived through a long life in perfect ignorance of their deprivation. Were they the better or the happier for that ignorance ? Logicians might doubtless spin out arguments on both sides of the question ; but Catherine would

have promptly answered, "No, not happier, not better." For goodness does not consist in a gradual lowering of the nature, such as must take place when that very tie which is made the mystical type of Christ and his Church is divorced from the purest essence of its spiritual part. And happiness is a lofty word, which we fitly apply to seraphic conditions, and is degraded when we thus designate a state of worldly content or petty ambitions, of mean pleasures or mere physical enjoyments.

Catherine had not yet brought her heart to say, "I wish I had never known Algernon Raybrooke—I wish I had never distinguished between the ideal marriage and the life-tie which binds me to my faithful, honest husband." Though sometimes she let her fancy have play, conjecturing how differently her life would have shaped itself had her marriage taken place a few weeks after her engagement; and it is likely that she was right in thinking that she would have been far less gentle and yielding under the encroaching petty tyrannies of her aunt-mother-in-law, than she was at present. Undoubtedly she would have either laughed at

or resisted them, for the high spirit which her secret trouble had silently broken would have been a force offensive and defensive in every battle of life; and certain ignorances, such as her heart would have been encrusted with, benumb the sensibilities in a wonderful manner. She fancied she could see herself absorbed in her country duties, interested in agriculture, and even a little learned by this time on the subject of farm produce.

Alas! she fancied also that her interest in the forthcoming election would have been of a more single and enthusiastic character. Perhaps—for who knows how devoted she might have been to Reuben, or what might have happened under such altered circumstances?—perhaps she would have been brought round to Reuben's politics by this time, since in the ideal marriage it did not seem to her possible for husband and wife to think differently on great, grave subjects. But now, though wearing her husband's colours, rendering him lip-service whenever her speech could help him, but forwarding his cause, unconsciously, yet more by the mere personal power and charm of her pres-

ence, she knew not in her heart of hearts what it was she wished.

The day of nomination came, and in a large old-fashioned open carriage, drawn near the hustings, Mrs. Appersley and Catherine and her mother heard the candidates address the multitude. Catherine was agreeably surprised by Reuben's speech. Though he had very little of an orator's skill, though his vocabulary was limited, and his unaffected manner almost conversational, there was a manliness in his simplicity, an honest heartiness in his words, which won upon his auditors, and predisposed them to trust him. The fellow-Conservative who shared his colours, and stood beside him, was an older man, and a far more experienced politician. In expounding his own views, he was able to amplify many of Reuben's statements, while paying a compliment to his modesty, and the air was rent with acclamations in favour of the "Red."

Then came the turn of the "Blues." Of course each party had its two candidates, and Algeron Raybrooke was the last speaker. No competent judge could have doubted that he

was the most accomplished gentleman and polished orator of all who that day appealed to the enlightened burghers of Fordinghill. The half-truths which belonged to his party were so rounded by his eloquence, that only his stubborn opponents could deny their satisfactory completeness; but then Mr. Raybrooke had contrived, in the course of a year, to foster a great amount of stubborn opposition among his constituents. He certainly wished to be again returned for the borough, or he would not have been there that day, but it was with a divided inclination, after all. He would have been well content to spend the next year or two in travel, or in watching public events; but yet he desired the opportunity of righting himself with the Fordinghill people, and proving to them that he understood their interests better than they did themselves. Yet directly he touched upon local affairs—those local affairs in reference to which he had been accused of indifference and neglect—his words were drowned in the storm of hisses his explanation had called forth. All further attempts at making himself heard were unsuccessful, and after

standing for awhile with folded arms contemplating the noisy mob, and not controlling the expression of angry scorn which rested on his face, he made a ceremonious bow and withdrew.

"What a shame!" whispered Mrs. Freeth, who, however, was quite aware that it was not exactly her place at that moment to sympathise with Reuben's rival—"what a shame to treat him so badly! Oh! how frightened I should have been if they had hissed Reuben, and stopped him in that rude way! Luckily, Mr. Raybrooke does not seem to have any ladies belonging to him, or they might have got insulted too. Poor fellow!—and I know all he was telling them is quite true—it is just what I have heard Hubert say over and over again."

"Hush, Bessie, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Appersley; and she continued—"What can you know about Mr. Raybrooke and the canal business?"

"A good deal, I assure you," replied Mrs. Freeth, with more warmth than belonged to her usual manner; for, to own the truth, she was not now quite so easily "put down" by

her sister-in-law as formerly. "Mr. Raybrooke visited at our house last Winter—came to the children's Christmas party, M.P. though he was—a most nice gentlemanly young man, I thought him—and I heard Hubert talk about that very canal affair, saying what the townspeople wanted was quite ridiculous and preposterous."

"Well, well, my dear," said Mrs. Appersley, "my brother may be right, but he is not infallible."

"Not in such a thing as that!" interrupted the faithful wife, to whom such words were a sort of petty treason. "Why, if he don't know all about canals, and railways, and viaducts, I wonder who does?"

"But even if he is right," resumed Mrs. Appersley, growing irate at anything like an argument, "it is not for us to say such things."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Freeth; "and I spoke so low that I am sure no one but you and Catherine could possibly hear me. But I do feel for Mr. Raybrooke very much indeed, and I don't see why I should not say so among

ourselves. How I wish they would elect him and Reuben both!"

"That would never do," said Mrs. Appersley; "it would be as bad as having no member at all."

"Why so?"

"Aunty means," interrupted Catherine, "that two members of opposite politics would be always voting against each other, and so neutralising one another's votes."

"Ah, I see," replied the gentle, unpolitical Mrs. Freeth. "What a pity! It would have been so nice. Now it does seem a little as if Reuben were turning a friend out."

"No, mamma dear," said Catherine, "you forget that Reuben does not know Mr. Raybrooke—he cannot possibly be called his friend." The words were rather pleasant words under the circumstances, and yet they came forth with something very like a little sigh.

"Well, I did forget—but I remember now Reuben was not with us at the time of the children's party. But he must have heard us talk about him."

"I know Papa mentioned him when we were in town."

"And you, Catherine, did you never talk about him, meeting him at Lady Hartrington's as you did, and knowing him quite well?—though of course it is natural now that you should be absorbed in Reuben's election."

"Which I think he may consider as pretty sure," replied Catherine.

"Kate," said Mrs. Appersley, after a little pause, and she sat opposite to her daughter-in-law, "how pale you look!—what is the matter?—are you ill?"

"I don't feel quite well; I suppose it is the excitement of the scene. I was going to ask mamma, if she does not mind, to change seats with me, so that I may not ride home backwards."

"I will change seats with you," said Mrs. Appersley. "Yes, pray let me," she continued, laying her hand on Mrs. Freeth's arm; "I have no fid-fad fancies about riding backwards, but you *are* delicate, I know, and I won't allow it. Only I thought Catherine was too much of a Freeth to be affected by such trifles."

"Nor am I generally—and, after all, it is of no

consequence, and I feel better now, so pray, Aunt, keep your seat."

"No, no, I won't have you go home ill," and Mrs. Appersley of course had her will.

They waited till Reuben could join them and take the fourth place in the roomy barouche, so it fell out that Catherine faced both husband and mother-in-law during her drive home. Reuben was so sorry for her headache—so pleased at her praise of his speech, and folded her hands so caressingly in his when he leaned forward to speak, that Catherine was touched to tears. It was a curious fact that Catherine always felt most tenderly towards her husband when her mood was one of rebuke to herself.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RIVAL CANDIDATES.

Every man is under the influence, not of the circumstances which placed him in a particular situation, but of the circumstances which resulted from it.

H. BULWER.

THE Election was over. Two Conservatives were returned for Fordinghill, Reuben Appersley being at the head of the poll.

It was a clear Autumn day, with a light breeze from the west, which just fluttered the party streamers that dangled from the windows of the High Street, and kept from drooping the various flags which decorated some of the more important buildings. Reuben of course was in the town, ready to make his acknowledgments to the enlightened constituents; and he did so

briefly and frankly, and pleased the people mightily. Algernon Raybrooke watched the proceedings, and smiled to think how little more than a year ago he had been similarly greeted.

By the way, he, the "liberal" candidate of certainly "advanced" opinions, had in his heart of hearts a thorough scorn for the "cry of curs."

Apart from all the accidents of birth and position, his nature was patrician, and his claim for more light, more liberty for all classes, was that they might have freedom, and rise out of the slough which oppressed so many among the masses, and made them, by the force of circumstances, despicable to him. At the same time he felt a little despicable to himself for having stooped to electioneering tactics, for having flattered and coaxed, and doubly despicable for his failure. The provoking thing was that Sir Richard would be vexed and disappointed at his present discomfiture, and perhaps not quite ready to believe that he, Algernon, had not been to blame.

It was therefore in no very pleasant mood that he took leave of the Fordinghill electors. Indeed, in the little speech he thought proper to

make after the new members had said their say, he was slightly ironical, and under soft-sounding phrases something contemptuous made itself felt. But it was a brutal thing to hustle him as they did when he descended from the platform, and a thing to which he was in no humour long to submit. He bore it patiently at first ; but a "rough" approached him with mischief in his manner, and then Algernon thought it was time to show that there was a "thus-far-and-no farther" to go with him. Accordingly, he seized the man by the strongest remains of his tattered collar, and hurled him some paces away ; then, taking off his gloves, he threw them into the street, as if to mark his disgust for the creature he had touched. The action was like lighting a train. Fists were clenched, and foul language was used, and missiles were hurled at Algernon from several directions. Reuben Appersley felt shocked at the scene, and a cry of "shame" escaped his lips ; but when he saw Algernon turn pale, and reel from the sickening blow of a stone which he had received on his forehead, the new member could

restrain himself no longer, but springing to the side of his late opponent, became himself his protector.

This new turn of affairs amused the fickle mob, and it made way, amid nothing more hurtful than jeers and laughter, for the two gentlemen to pass. It was high time, for Mr. Raybrooke was really hurt, and too thankful for help and succour to notice much whence it came, he allowed himself to be led by Reuben to his hotel, whence medical assistance was summoned.

Perhaps the doctor was a fussy country practitioner, who used more violent remedies than were needful; perhaps he was really only skillfully prudential and preventive,—at all events, he ordered his patient to bed, and applied leeches to his head. Reuben was infinitely distressed at the conduct of the mob; while Algernon's whole behaviour so won upon him that he felt strangely attracted towards him. Half stunned by the blow, and suffering extremely, Algernon Raybrooke was still able to make his acknowledgments, and point out to Reuben how necessary it was that he should

leave him, and keep some appointments which he had.

"Yes, yes," replied Reuben, "but I assure you I have still a good half hour to spare. And, Mr. Raybrooke, I have a proposal to make. I must sleep at Fordinghill to-night. If you are better to-morrow—well enough to bear a long drive in an easy phaeton—not half so fatiguing, you know, as the jar of a railway—will you come with me to Five Oaks, and be my guest till that ugly bruise is gone."

"You are too good, too good!" ejaculated Algernon; "but I hardly think I dare go; and what would the Fordinghill people say to such a visit?"

"Say!—why, they ought to be thankful that you should be among their friends, while you bear such a badge of their disgraceful conduct."

"A kind and courteous way of putting your invitation. I assure you I feel it so. Mr. Appersley, do you know you are a great tempter?"

"I shall not think so if I do not tempt," laughed Reuben; "but you will come—you will not find yourself with strangers. You know my relations the Freeths, and Mrs. Freeth is with

us just now; and perhaps you recollect my wife—I know she remembers you.”

“She does me honour,” replied Algernon, who for a moment speculated as to how much the bruise disfigured him.

“All the womenkind are capital nurses,” continued Reuben; “so I shall fully expect you. I shall tell your man to pack up the few things you may want.”

“You have tempted,” said Algernon, grasping Reuben’s hand as he spoke.

Algernon was really touched by Reuben’s hospitable wish, and though he was conscious of feeling curiosity to behold Catherine in her new estate, he did not recognise a disloyal or unworthy thought in his own heart. Did not “recognise,” but for all that he was morally weak. It was in his nature to toy with danger when he thought it was only himself who could suffer. Morally weak was he, and yet imaginatively strong and generous. Because he knew that he ought to rejoice that Catherine’s husband was, after all, “a fine fellow,” he positively believed that he did. Because he knew that he ought to look upon her with only icy admira-

tion and friendly regard, he thought all other memories could be stifled ; and he argued—and here was at least a grain of soundness in the plea—that, as probably they would often meet in society, the sooner the first plunge was over the better. Be it generously remembered that Algernon was wholly without suspicion that Catherine had suffered through him. Had he known all the truth, there were just two things he would have done. Had the knowledge come one minute before the marriage ceremony had commenced, he would have borne her away from the altar, or seen “the reason why.” Had it come as a dreadful knowledge one minute too late, he would have put seas and mountains between them, and have shunned seeing her for years.

Reuben sent a hurried note to his wife, in accordance with which a guest-chamber was made ready ; and with that calmness which is becoming when we await the inevitable, Catherine prepared herself to play hostess to Algernon Raybrooke. She also felt strong in her own strength, and summing up all the advantages of her lot in life, she set herself reso-

lutely to admiring and contemplating them.

After all, this want of intellectual sympathy with her immediate associates, which she recognised as the great drawback to her happiness, was it not the mere morbid craving of youth? If it was, she must conquer it; if it was not, surely she would meet with congenial minds in the world some day or another, and would cease to feel that there had been only one being to whom her nature seemed thoroughly to respond. These reflections had the effect of adding a trifle of dignity to her manner when she received Algernon, and bade him welcome to Five Oaks. But the trifle of dignity was perhaps an additional, though momentary charm. A generous and genial nature only wears gracefully its ordinary amount of dignity, and least of all finds it easy to be stately or cold to an invalid guest.

It was Catherine's habit to meet her husband at the threshold, and now that she had to see him for the first time as the Member for Fordinghill, their greeting had naturally a little extra demonstration. Catherine had heard the wheels, and had seen the phaeton rolling with

slackened pace along the avenue. The dogs as usual bounded and barked, doors were thrown wide open, and a groom hurried from the stables to be ready for the horses. Reuben sprang out, and then assisted his guest, who looked pale and leaned upon a stick; and Catherine found that she had shaken hands with Raybrooke before her husband took her in his arms with what his mother called a "bear's hug," and gave her a hearty kiss.

"Something to eat—give us something to eat!" was his first exclamation. "We are as hungry as hunters—at least I am, and I hope Mr. Raybrooke, who was dinnerless yesterday, has recovered his appetite."

"You forget I am in the doctor's hands," said Algernon, with a smile.

"Ah! but the doctor said you were not wholly to starve, and he named claret for your wine—I remember that. Kitty, you know the 'Château-Margaux;' will you look after it yourself, there's a darling! I want to go round to the stables, while Mr. Raybrooke washes his hands."

"Oh! let me not trouble Mrs. Appersley,"

said Algernon, who, if he had been married, would about as soon have thought of asking his wife to saddle his horse as to go to the wine-cellar. Yet he had too much tact to say more, especially as Catherine quickly replied,

“Oh! I am very often butler, I assure you.”

And so she was, and for this reason: Reuben had a certain manly laziness, and liked being waited on, and Catherine always obeyed his instructions literally and exactly; whereas his mother, had she been entrusted with the wine-cellar key, would have brought up just what she considered right and desirable, or else had an argument to establish the why and why not. But the little incident was, I think, unlucky; it made Raybrooke notice many trifles which turned his thoughts into the channel of compassion.

Mrs. Freeth, whom he liked because she was Catherine's mother, and whose sweet womanly qualities he had penetration enough to appreciate, greeted him cordially, lamenting his illness, and the treatment he had received. There was no ignoring that blurred discoloration which certainly branded Fording-

hill more even than it disfigured him. Mrs. Appersley, senior, who always thawed to a guest, and with whom hospitality was a cardinal virtue, made herself as pleasant as she could to a stranger with whom it would hardly be too much to say that she had not an opinion in common. Raybrooke was an accomplished gentleman, and as such could not be other than deferential to the mother of his host. But where persons are born to clash, as these two certainly were, indications of temperament will make themselves felt, even under the most polished exterior.

Mrs. Appersley was not a reading woman, and she cared not for music and knew little of art; thus many a lovely neutral ground on which very opposite people may meet was closed to them; and when one stays a week in a country house, with a small circle that one meets every day at every meal, it is really necessary to find something safe to talk about to every member of it. Mrs. Appersley called herself an orthodox churchwoman—she was, in reality, rigid, formal, narrow, and, as far as one frail mortal may dare to judge of another, be it

said, with only the dry unvitalised skeleton of faith. Raybrooke was a latitudinarian, too frank to call himself more a believer than he was. Mrs. Appersley was an old-fashioned "red-hot" Tory—Raybrooke "an advanced Liberal," of the new school of politics. He was philosophic, with much of the philosophy falsely so called—poetic, theoretic, artistic, oratoric, enthusiastic, and many-sided. She was practical and matter-of-fact, but not dull—on the contrary, she was shrewd, piercingly shrewd as far as her faculties and training permitted, and within her own narrow limits. Algernon Raybrooke remained a week at Five Oaks; by the end of which time, and though the current of perfect politeness had never been ruffled, a tacit but settled feeling of mutual detestation was established between him and Mrs. Appersley, senior.

On the other hand, Mrs. Freeth had grown to like him very much indeed, and when they parted it was with many expressed wishes that he should be a frequent visitor at Telford House.

To Catherine that week was a very memor-

able period. The keenest censor of morals and manners would not have found fault with word or action of Algernon Raybrooke. Without too much ignoring their past acquaintance, he in no way behaved as if it had been less slight than to the majority of lookers-on it had appeared. He did not take up the "dropped threads" of their discourse, as he had done on a former occasion, but he rendered the new topics which were started at the least as interesting. Above all, there was an indescribable difference of manner which made intercourse with him much more easy than she had expected it to be. It was no one's fault—only in the natural course of events that the broad distinctions of character and training between Algernon Raybrooke and Reuben Appersley, should become more than ever apparent in their new relations of host and guest; and this though they filled their relative parts equally well, all things considered. Nor was the contrast always in Algernon's favour; there were many topics, and often those on which information would be very useful to a Member of Parliament, on which Reuben was the better instructed—though he

was deaf and blind to the *nuances* of literary criticism and the esoteric views of life. It was a result of Algernon's visit to Five Oaks that Catherine no longer looked forward with dread to meeting him in general society.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TACIT UNDERSTANDING.

Be not so mad as thou hast been of yore,
Yet happier far. Is not the Now thine own?
Now ever present? *Now* for evermore?
Now always with thee, but its worth unknown,
Or lightly thought of?

CHARLES MACKAY.

HUBERT FREETH was still in Switzerland, and his family scattered, as we know. It must have been at least equal holiday-making for some considerable period to the servants at Telford House, seeing what ample time they had had for putting the house in order. To be sure curtains were still folded up instead of hung, and the stairs were carpetless, and the chimney ornaments were not arranged, and the

rugs were in no case unrolled ; for Burton, who was chief directress of affairs, knew that she should have a week's notice of the return of the family, and had no notion of having to do things needlessly over again.

Not that Burton was an idle woman, but she really had a good many affairs on her mind just now. She was not quite content with her own progress upwards in the world. She had good wages, it was true, but never was there a place with less indirect gains, Mrs. Freeth having absurd notions about the sinfulness of what she called waste—wearing things till—so Burton thought—she ought to be ashamed, or else giving them away according to her own discretion, not passing them to her servants with a “never let me see that again,” as a “real lady” would do.

Burton, lady's-maid though she was, had volunteered to make herself useful in a general way whilst the family were absent—the truth being that, in a quiet manner, she was “setting her cap” at Mr. Parkins, the butler, and had thought the present opportunity for advancing a flirtation a very favourable one. The cook was fat,

fair, and forty, if she was a day ; there only remained, of womankind in the house, to compete with her, the second housemaid, with her doll's face, and the gawky kitchen girl.

Somehow or other, however, Burton was not satisfied with the progress of events. If there had been any incipient rivalry during the Summer, it was a pity Burton went to Shinglebeach for the doll's face had made way during her absence. Worthy Mr. Parkins was but mortal man, and mortal men will, while the world lasts, bow to the influence of rosy cheeks, and bright eyes, and a carolling voice that sets work to music, and seems the pledge of a cheerful temper. Then Burton was just of the age when even much better women grow a little bitter towards the *beauté de diable* of youth, though a score of years later they veer round, and admit its fascinations unreservedly.

Altogether, Hannah Burton was in an especially discontented, spiteful frame of mind one particular evening, for Mr. Parkins had taken "doll's face" to the play, with the fat cook for *chaperon*. To be sure he had said that he knew it was a mere compliment to ask Mrs. Burton to

go, as it would not do for so many of them to be out of the house together—in which opinion she very properly coincided.

Though still September, the weather was cold and raw, with a fog coming on that seemed borrowed from November, when, just as the hall-clock struck eight, a cab rattled up to the door; a loud knock and ring followed, and the next minute Lionel Freeth and Cuthbert Rawlins, with certain carpet-bags and portman-teaus, were in the hall.

Burton had opened the door promptly, for she had been sitting in the dining-parlour, where she had lighted a fire—for the sake of the pictures, she said—and she ushered the two young men into the room with an air of satisfaction at her precaution.

“Yes, it is lucky that there’s a fire, at any rate,” exclaimed Lionel. “And now, Burton, who is in the house, and what can we have to eat?”

“Well, sir, we are a small party, but cook did not go to the sea-side—the people of the house there do the cooking for Mrs. Brindley and the young ladies—so to-morrow, I’m sure, sir, we can make you very comfortable, but to-

night—just to-night—there's only the kitchen-maid at home."

"But surely she can cook us a chop; or is there nothing else in the house she can send up?"

"Yes, sir," replied Burton, "there's cold roast-beef, if that will do; as fine a sirloin as you can wish, roasted only to-day, upper side not cut, on purpose that there might be a nice supper after the play."

"Oh! the rest are at the play, are they? Quite right to enjoy themselves. Only please to let us have up the beef—some slices of the upper side will be quite a treat, after two months out of England. And, Burton, will you get a room ready for Mr. Rawlins, he will stay here for a few days?"

It was promotion for the gawky kitchenmaid to cook for the family, and she seized the occasion with avidity, though it was only to boil and mash potatoes, while Burton condescended to lay the cloth. No wine was accessible, but of bottled beer there was abundance; and on Cuthbert Rawlins saying something about brandy-and-water, Burton recollected a bottle

of *vieux Cognac*, hardly touched, which stood in the butler's pantry.

Getting the bedrooms ready at that time of night made the two women busy for upwards of an hour. Meanwhile, with everything within their reach, waiting was not considered necessary by Lionel and his guest.

They were young men, be it remembered, healthy and hungry. They were cold and tired, after a day and night of incessant travelling; and, under such circumstances, good food, with a blazing fire, might have been expected to enliven them prodigiously. But it did not. These boon companions of the other day were singularly taciturn now.

After supper, Cuthbert Rawlins helped himself to the *vieux Cognac*, which he had so much desired, and Lionel, as host, mixed a small quantity with water to keep his guest company. But he scarcely touched the beverage, and soon rose from the table to stand in the Englishman's most detestable fashion, with his back to the fire. There had been a pause of ominous duration, like that hush of the elements which precludes the few big drops of rain when a thunder-

storm is to follow presently. Lionel it was who broke the silence by exclaiming,

"I hope, Rawlins, you thoroughly understand me? I wish there should be no mistake."

"I ought to understand you," replied the other, "for you've spoken deucedly plain."

"In offering you the hospitalities of my father's house until you can see your way a little, I know I am only doing what he would desire. But more money I cannot furnish. Cuthbert, I do not wish to be severe, but the entanglements into which I have been drawn, and the sight of that slough of disgrace from which we have just now but narrowly escaped, make me feel that the life you saved is becoming a burden. Something like this I have felt before to-day, yet never so keenly as now."

"Spoken like a book, upon my word!" returned Rawlins; "but if you are so down in the mouth, I wonder what I must be?"

"I don't think the comparison is quite fair," said Lionel, after a slight pause, and a gulp, rather than a sip, of his neglected brandy-and-water.

"Not fair, I suppose, because I am the

naughty boy of the story, and have brought all my troubles on myself," exclaimed Rawlins, in a tone that implied something like reproach, while it appealed for commiseration.

"You have said it. But if I think you are the naughty boy of the story, God knows I do not consider myself the good one."

"Well," returned Rawlins, "I should have said you were, and the very prince of good fellows, up to the last month or two."

"Do not let us bandy words. All the facts are mutually known to us. I have been generous, but with money that was not my own; and what were mine—time, intellect, energy—I have wasted. But this last mad plunge at the gaming-table has been the *coup* which I suppose was needed to bring me to my senses."

"Well, I did not suppose I had such a perfect innocent to deal with. If you had but held your tongue, and looked unconscious, my winnings would have paid off all old scores, and set us up again in the world."

"Winnings, you would have called them!"

"Yes, winnings, for I held the winning card. Why, even if it had been a changeling, as they

wanted to prove, it would only have been the joke of a sleight of hand, such as you and I have suffered from in all seriousness more than once."

"Cuthbert! Cuthbert!" exclaimed Lionel, passing his fingers through his hair, and then clasping his hands together at the back of his head—"Cuthbert, is it you or I that is going mad?"

"Neither, I hope; though I am about as hard up as ever a fellow was. Yet I suppose I shall fall upon my feet again some day. It is very well for you, who have been brought up to a profession, and with notions of work, to be so mighty particular; but I believed myself heir to a fine property till last year, when my old uncle thought proper to marry again, and now I am cut out by the birth of a son. However, you'll see; I've still my mother's allowance, and the family must get me into something or other. I shall pay all my debts, if I live long enough. First and foremost, I shall endeavour to pay you."

"Thank you," replied Lionel, curtly, and with all graciousness extracted by his tone

from those naturally gracious words. Then, after a minute's pause, he added—

“I shall go to bed now ; you can sit up as long as you like. Burton will show you to your room. I don't know where they are going to put you. Good night.”

“Good night,” returned the guest, but without rising from his chair. Nor did the young men shake hands.

Presently Burton came in, and busied herself with clearing away the supper things. She knew that this was the gentleman who had jumped into the water and saved Mr. Lionel from drowning, and she had a distinct recollection of him at the Juvenile Christmas party when he whirled with Phoebe in the *valse à deux temps*, and the servants looked on admiringly from the door-way ; and she did think it a little odd of Mr. Lionel to have left him in this uncereemonious manner. Doubtless these reflections added to the keenness of her scrutiny, as from time to time she looked at the guest, who was now leaning back moodily in an easy-chair, which he had turned round to the fire.

Burton had several times in her life made

capital out of very dirty work—as gold diggers of many sorts do ; and it was one of her habits, which had become second nature, to suspect a secret or a mystery from the faintest indications of it; while, from much practice, she was singularly skilful in the tentative process called “feeling the way.”

“It is a cold evening, sir,” said Burton as she filled a tray with glasses and plates; “shall I light a fire in your room?”

“No—I think not, thank you ; I will not give you so much trouble.”

“No trouble, sir, I assure you,” said Burton. “I had better light it, if you do not object.”

“Oh, I do not object; only really it is not necessary;” but while thus acknowledging the civility of the woman, he looked up, and their eyes met.

There is sometimes a sort of freemasonry established by a look, and it was so in this instance. The two felt that they might be of use to each other.

“It *is* cold,” continued Rawlins, by way of encouraging conversation, “but I see you un-

derstand making up a fire, and this room is deliciously warm."

"Well, sir, I have kept up a good fire all day for the sake of the furniture and the pictures; things do so spoil with even a touch of damp. I don't know, sir, whether you have noticed the new pictures—them that have been painted since you were here in the Winter."

"No, indeed, I have not observed them particularly, but I suppose you mean the portraits of the young gentlemen that I see."

"Yes," returned Burton, "and of the young ladies too, only they are put together. It is what you call a fancy picture."

"Ah, I must get up and look at them," said Rawlins.

"I'll turn the gas on a little more," cried Burton, doing so as she spoke, and thoroughly illuminating the room.

That Summer the young Freeths had sat to a rising artist, who had produced life-like portraits of Gilbert and little Teddy, and had grouped Phoebe and Jane together, costuming them in flowing drapery which bore no stamp of a fleeting fashion. Thus did the painter hope

the better to preserve the aspect and reality of youthfulness in his creation. Jane had a rosebud in her hand, as if just gathered, and Phoebe a book half opened. It was really a pretty picture, though, as the likenesses were excellent, it scarcely deserved the term Burton had applied to it.

"You remember the young ladies, of course," said the woman. "Opinions differ, but I think Miss Phoebe is the beauty of the family."

"She is very pretty certainly," said Rawlins; "I remember her well enough to know what a good likeness this is."

"And most likely she'll be the fortune of the family too."

"Fortune!" exclaimed Rawlins, in real surprise.

"Yes, sir; don't you know Miss Phoebe's godmother dotes upon her. And she is a lady of property, with nothing but cats and dogs that may be said to belong to her. In fact, I was as good as told by her own maid that Miss Phoebe was to have everything."

"And is the godmother an old lady?" said Rawlins.

"Well, middling old—a good bit over sixty, I should think, and getting very frail; it's a regular churchyard cough that she has."

"Poor old lady! Does she live in London through all these fogs?" asked Cuthbert.

"Yes, she's mighty fond of her own home in Bloomsbury Square." And Burton added, "She gets good rooms cheap there; but if she saves, it is my belief it is mostly for Miss Phoebe's sake."

"Well, upon my word," said Rawlins, "you have given me quite a little history. But a churchyard cough and Bloomsbury Square are a most gloomy conjunction—one needs the idea of a pretty little heiress to restore cheerfulness!"

"I am glad you think Miss Phoebe pretty."

"Upon my word I do. In my opinion she was the prettiest girl at the children's party last Christmas."

"Ah, and she's prettier now. But I beg pardon, sir, for talking in this way. Is there anything more you wish for to-night?"

"Nothing at all, I thank you."

"And what time would you like to be called in the morning, sir?"

"What is the usual breakfast hour?"

"Nine o'clock in the Winter—when the family are at home; but I am sure, sir, you can breakfast at what hour you like."

"Oh, nine o'clock will suit me exactly; but I am very tired, and may oversleep myself. So I shall be glad if somebody will knock at my door in good time."

Now it chanced that Lionel Freeth, also tired and jaded in mind and body, was the lazy one next morning. But he sent a message down-stairs, entreating Mr. Rawlins not to wait breakfast. And the aroma of the hot coffee was so pleasant, and the appearance of some dainty cutlets so appetising, that the guest had no temptation to demur. There was now the butler in attendance, but Burton came across the visitor in the course of the morning, and a little further tittle-tattle was then indulged in. Without a compromising word having been spoken between them, Burton understood that Cuthbert Rawlins was well inclined to make up to the "fortune of the family;" and he comprehended that

there was a keen edged tool ready for his use, provided he should need it—and could pay for it—a tool that might help to cut through obstacles and smoothe down difficulties.

Lionel and his guest were that day very little together until dinner time, by which period the young host had arrived at a decision. Cuthbert's society had become intolerable to him—yet he could not refuse the shelter of his father's roof to the man who had saved his life. He could, however, leave him to his own devices; and after dinner Lionel announced his intention of going the next morning to Shinglebeach, to see Mrs. Brindley and his sisters, whence he should probably proceed straight to Cambridge, in readiness for the Michaelmas Term. With a cold courtesy he begged Cuthbert to make himself at home at Telford House, for the few days during which he had said it would be a convenience for him to remain in London.

In reality, it was of vital importance that the visitor should remain where he was for half a week longer—should date certain letters he desired to write from a creditable address, and should have time to arrange plans for the fu-

ture. When he took his departure the following week, he presented a pair of gold sleeve-links to Burton, as a *souvenir*,—or retainer.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE BEACH.

Old Ocean's roar was mellowed in its sound ;
The sea-bird silent dipt his glancing wing
In foam of jewelled tint, while echo's ring
Awoke not in the calm that reigned around.

EDITH MILNER.

BY one of the caprices of the English climate, a foretaste of Winter had been followed by a return of pleasant Autumn weather ; so that when Lionel Freeth reached Shinglebeach he found himself beneath a sky which, by way of distinction from southern skies, might be called of British blue. True, it was abundantly flecked by fleecy clouds, which piled themselves about the horizon, and reflected the calm radiance of the equinoctial sunset. But the air was calm,

and the tide rose lazily, as if the flat waves were weary of strife, and were gathering up their remaining strength.

The contrast presented by the Shinglebeach of to-day to the London of yesterday, was no inappropriate type of the relief Lionel felt at having broken away from the companionship of the last several weeks. Certainly, there are persons, very far from highly gifted, who exercise a powerful personal influence wherever—as it would seem—they choose to exert it. Very often such people are far inferior in mental calibre to the friends or relations whom, for a time, they absolutely rule; and all the while this is a fact tacitly understood, if not openly acknowledged, between the parties. I do not think that Cuthbert Rawlins, in his wildest mood of self-adulation—and such moods were not uncommon with him—would have placed himself, intellectually, on a par with Lionel Freeth, but he had a trick of making a merit of his own deficiencies, which had something in it that was infectious. He would speak with a semilament of his own incorrigible idleness, till the listener was half persuaded that a state of

graceful indolence was rather a praiseworthy condition, receptive of the best influences, and to be coveted—rather than despised—as one teeming with happy consequences. He would tell of his own follies and extravagances till they seemed, on the one hand, the promptings of ultra-generosity and refinement; on the other, sharp lessons, which had struck home like arrows to the mark. There was a caressing cadence in his voice, that bewitched women, and did not fall wholly without effect even on men whom he sought to charm: but to permanently succeed in the world, insincere people need a vigilance which is superhuman. The fatal hour always strikes when they are unmasked, and, it may be, even judged too severely. There is no recoil like the recoil from love to hate, from trust to suspicion, and this was the sort of recoil which had taken place in Lionel's mind towards the college friend who had been so dear to him only a year ago.

Though an unexpected visitor, Lionel was of course cordially and enthusiastically welcomed by the little party, of which Mrs. Brindley was the presiding spirit. The loving glee of his

sisters at seeing him, the boisterous delight of Gilbert, and the childish pleasure of little Teddy, made up something wholesome and refreshing, that braced his moral nature, while it brought the tears almost to his eyes. Almost—not quite; for Lionel had the Englishman's power of driving back such evidences of emotion.

Mrs. Brindley herself was delightfully affable, and improvised half a dozen plans and projects for passing the time, and enjoying the pleasant weather to the utmost. They had but another week to remain at Shinglebeach, she observed, and must live out of doors, if possible.

A week! what a little speck of time it is, and how often passed in a calm monotony that leaves but the faintest record behind. And yet, events which make turning-points in a career—meetings and partings that are the landmarks of a life's chart—may all happen in one little week—nay, in one short day, and be the shaping force of a long future; whispered words may be spoken in a minute that shall have reverberating echoes to the soul while memory holds its power—words that are no promise, and yet bind more subtly than a vow. Thoughts

may be thought that burn themselves into the fibre of our being, and become integral with it; and looks may ratify a compact which no earthly powers and potentates can annul.

Mrs. Brindley had not the slightest objection to her daughter and Lionel being thrown together in the unrestrained intercourse of sea-side life; and when two young people are very much inclined to each other's society, and the *chaperon* systematically refrains from interference, it is surprising to note the number of opportunities for a *tête-à-tête* which seem spontaneously to arise. Indeed, Lionel felt himself "lucky" on more than one occasion. When the whole party were half-way down the pier, Mrs. Brindley sometimes remembered some special mission in the town, and sent back the young Freeths to execute it; but anxious about their doings, she would shortly follow them, not, however, without recommending Lionel and Aline by all means to continue their walk.

Or the breeze was too keen for Phoebe and Jane, though it had just the degree of briny roughness which benefited the slender, delicate Aline so much. Certainly this last week that

lovely tint, the pink of the sea-shell, or of a rose leaf, deepening sometimes to the fuller flush of the ripened peach, was very frequent on Aline's fair cheek. Altogether, there was a radiance about her that heightened every personal advantage she had, and at her worst Aline could hardly be called other than a pretty girl; but hers was a mobile face, about which there were different opinions.

One day Lionel and Aline had strolled away from their party to the extreme end of the little town. Hereabouts a row of unfinished houses abutted upon the rising downs, and the shore, gently curving, formed a little cove, where only at exceptionally high tides did the sea come up to the cliff. Consequently there was a pleasant space where the beach was dry, and where some large boulders made really convenient seats.

"After our long walk you must rest," said Lionel. "I am sure you are tired."

"Only a little tired—not very," replied Aline; "five minutes of rest will be quite enough for me."

So saying, Aline descended the wooden steps

which led to the beach, and had selected a great boulder with a wall of cliff at its back, while the dry pebbles were still crunching beneath Lionel's feet. Not till she was fairly seated did Aline perceive what a really secluded nook she had chosen, and then some maiden consciousness of a mistake heightened her colour. She hastily unfurled her parasol, though really the sunshine was not oppressive, exclaiming as she did so,

"Indeed, I shall be rested in a minute. I assure you I am not tired."

"Oh! but I am; tired of so many things," exclaimed Lionel, with a sigh. "And you said five minutes, and I am going to ask for ten. I want to tell you a story, while—while we rest."

"A story! Oh, that will be delightful; but do you really like being here?—you know the esplanade seat is not far off."

"Do not stir, I beseech you," said Lionel, lightly touching her arm. "This is the very spot in which to tell my story, and to be at your feet while I do so is all that I ask."

So saying, he threw himself upon the shingle, and leaning his head upon his elbow, contrived

to bring his face beneath the shadow of Aline's large sunshade parasol. It was one of those calm September days when every sound of nature—the trill of a bird, the hum of an insect, the rustle of a leaf—seems a still small voice that speaks to the soul; and notably was it a day on which the music of the sea becomes the diapason that includes those other voices, and attunes the heart to mystic thoughts and subtle fancies.

There was a momentary pause, while Aline and Lionel gazed at the "crawling" waves as they came up gently to cast their silvery fringe upon the shore. No human creature was in sight, though a few fishermen's craft were just visible, and the smoke of distant steamers trailed along the horizon. It was privacy without desolation.

"In three days I must be at Cambridge," exclaimed Lionel, and I may not have a better opportunity than this for telling my story."

"I am listening—pray begin," said Aline, with a sort of mock gravity.

"Once upon a time there lived a young man——"

"A prince at least!" interrupted Aline, the mock gravity rippling with a smile. "A prince at least, if the story has that fairy-tale like beginning."

"A prince! Ah, I wish the hero were a prince!" returned Lionel, without, at the moment, proceeding with his narrative.

"If he is not a prince," continued Aline, "I beg of you to begin his story some other way. 'Once upon a time' is a sort of trumpet tone that always calls me straight away to fairyland; and I confess that I delight in the fine company I meet there."

"Ah!" said Lionel, "I am afraid such fine company makes you intolerant of meaner folks—poor faulty mortals."

"That is a severe little speech, but perhaps I deserve it."

"I did not mean it for severity—and had no thought of censure; how unhappy I am to have blundered!"

"I repeat that I have deserved a rebuke," said Aline, trying hard to keep up a tone of badinage not very natural to her. "But I must say that you are quite a stranger to fairyland, if you

think faulty mortals do not abound there. To be sure the fine company in which I so delight are the faulty people, made wise and good by the 'uses of adversity,' adversity being often the instrument chosen by beneficent fairies to bring about the happiest changes."

"Then you do believe in faulty people being made wise and good?" cried Lionel, drawing himself a little nearer to Aline, and venturing to twine his fingers in the fringe of her shawl.

"Of course I do! The loveliness of fairy-land consists in punishments not being in vain—in faulty people being shown their errors, and worthy people being certainly rewarded, and all things coming right at last."

"Then if you were Queen of the Fairies, you would not drive the evil-doers to despair?" asked Lionel.

"Certainly not; they should be happy directly they became good."

"But could they be quite happy, seeing the consequences of their evil?"

"Oh! in fairy-land consequences are altered at a fairy's will," answered Aline, merrily.

"And that is the sad difference between real

life and fairy life," said Lionel, with a sigh; "in real life we cannot escape the consequences of evil. As some poet says,

'A deed can never die.'

"Yes, but even in real life the less evil we do, the less bad consequences must result. So the better people are the happier; they ought to be—of that I am quite sure."

"And you think it is never too late to mend?" rejoined Lionel.

"There is always some truth in a popular proverb; but," she continued, "I am waiting for your story. Only, unless it is something very beautiful, and that happened so long ago that one doesn't know and doesn't care whether it is true or not, pray don't begin with 'Once upon a time.'"

"I am afraid it is not a beautiful story, and I do want you to know and to care that it is true, so suppose I begin, 'Lately, there was a young man.'"

"Yes, that will do."

"A young Englishman who committed a great many follies, wasted time and opportuni-

ties, threw himself back in the race of life, got entangled in the coils and meshes of debt, sipped at that intoxicating draught called pleasure—in short, took a wrong turning on the way, and did not perceive that he was on the road to ruin, till a sharp jolt awakened him to the reality of things.”

Lionel paused, and Aline said gently,

“And what did he do then?”

“He struggled to the best of his ability, desperately, and at some cost, out of the bad road, but he is torn by remorse, and bruised and wounded in spirit. Yet, withal, he is so unreasonable that he wants to be happy, wants to enjoy high fortune as if he had deserved it, and wants to be secure of the love he is not worthy to seek. Oh! Aline, tell me that you pity him.”

Aline's face crimsoned, but she did not speak.

“Say that you pity him,” repeated Lionel.

“I do,” she replied, in a low voice.

“And,” cried Lionel, “when his foot is firmly planted on the right path—when energy and will have made up for lost time, could you love him, Aline, and forgive his faults and his follies? Speak, Aline, tell me.”

"In fairy-land it would be the right thing to do," she murmured.

"And I am sure you think the code of fairy-land perfection."

"That is true—for fairy-land."

"And should not mortals imitate what they so much admire?"

"Ah! if one could always do that!"

"Try—in pity, try! Ah! Aline," continued Lionel, "my punishment is that I must speak in allegories. I dare not otherwise."

Now, when loiterers on the sea-shore indulge in an interesting conversation, they are very apt to be unobservant of the advancing waves—and so it was on the present occasion. There is no telling what more definite turn the discourse might have taken, notwithstanding Lionel's "I dare not," had not a wave larger and rougher than its predecessors dashed its spray almost in their faces. There was a hurried move, of course, and Lionel helped Aline to step across some dry boulders, and in doing so held her hand with a firmness of grasp which she did not resent.

No verbal promise was asked or made, and

yet there were faith and trust between them ;
and the hours which remained for Lionel at
Shinglebeach gave to the homely little place
Eden aspects.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE.

Un homme peut tromper une femme par un feint attachement, pourvu qu'il n'en ait pas ailleurs un véritable.

LA BRUYERE.

The sunny bridge between the lip and heart which childhood builds was broken.

BULWER LYTTON.

“**A**ND tell dear mamma that there is not the least occasion for her to hurry home,” said Mrs. Brindley, addressing Phœbe Freeth, whose pen had for a moment ceased its rapid movement; “that everything is going on satisfactorily in town, and that in fact we are quite a ‘happy family.’ That is, my dear,” she continued, “if you think so; of course I can only answer for myself and Aline.”

"Oh! Mrs. Brindley," replied Phoebe, "I am sure we have all been as happy as possible with you, though I should not much wonder if Miss Otway, when she comes back, declares you have spoilt us; but I like being spoilt, as mamma knows very well. And I am sure this long letter will show her how much enjoyment we have had. I think we stayed just the right time at Shinglebeach. Another week, and we might have grown a little tired of it."

"Well, I was a little sorry to leave the sea," said Jane. "I fancy it would have taken several more weeks to tire me of it."

"That is, Jenny, because you are such a slow coach," said Phoebe, with a touch of disdain in her voice. "We all know that if you have only a piano to fly to when you like, and plenty of books to skim, you are quite contented; not to mention your love of paddling in the wet after nasty sea-weed, and making a mess of yourself in drying it afterwards."

"At any rate, I have brought home a nice little collection," returned Jane, with a smile; "and I am sure the tastes you mention are very innocent."

"Oh! yes, they are innocent enough," said the elder sister, with the characteristic toss of the head which, from habit, she retained, though she had latterly straightened out her curls, and adopted a more womanly style of coiffure. "Now, Mrs. Brindley," she continued, "what else is there to mention? I have told mamma that as Catherine so much wishes her to stay a little longer at Five Oaks, we all think it would be the greatest pity for her to come home just yet. Also that as it must be holiday till Miss Otway returns, you are taking us to the Crystal Palace and the National Gallery, and improving our minds in that very agreeable manner."

"What a rattle-brain you are growing, Phoebe!" cried Mrs. Brindley, with something of admiration implied in the censure.

"I suppose that is the natural result of being just seventeen, and having had a lovely birthday present. I have told mamma what a beautiful emerald ring godmamma sent me. I don't mind it being old-fashioned, because it is so good; and, besides, I can have it reset some day or other."

"I would never have it altered if I were you," observed Jane.

"Why not?"

"Because I am sure it was meant for a keepsake; and one doesn't like to alter keepsakes."

"Oh! that I call a nonsensical idea; or, as Gilbert would say, bosh. Now I have told mamma all the news I can think of—even to Mr. Rawlins calling to inquire after his letters, and condescending to stay dinner, and spend the evening with us."

If Phoebe Freeth had lived a generation or two sooner, in the days when letters were comparatively few, and it was thought a social duty to make them worth the postage, she would probably have been valued as a correspondent. She loved novelty and the surface-gossip of society, was egotist enough to consider her own doings must be very interesting to her intimates, and had none of that keen sympathy with the feelings of others which, in its dread of giving pain, so often arrests the pen. Penny pre-paid postage notwithstanding, she did in her heart pique herself a little on her epistolary powers; and liking to do that which

she thought she did well, she cultivated a small neat hand-writing, so that she compressed quite a budget in a couple of sheets of note-paper. Really her letter was an amusement at the breakfast-table at Five Oaks the next morning; and something of a help to Catherine's persuasions that her mother should still further prolong her visit. And so she did, for nearly another month.

Meanwhile Mrs. Brindley was mistress at Telford House, and took care that all the domestic affairs should be in charming order against Mrs. Freeth's return. During those memorable weeks, Cuthbert Rawlins often called, ostensibly to inquire after letters which he said Lionel had permitted him to have directed there; but latterly these visits had been in the evening, and on each occasion he fell more and more into the manner of an *habitué* of the house.

Mrs. Brindley liked society, especially gentlemen's society, and this was the dull season in London, therefore the occasional "dropping in" of a young man with the manners of the well-bred world, and who had always plenty of ready conversation, was very pleasant to her.

In her doting fondness for her daughter, she thought, too, that he admired Aline; and though she had a liking for Lionel Freeth, and a strong belief that some day he would be a capital match, she saw no objection to her daughter receiving a little harmless homage from another "eligible," which she presumed Mr. Rawlins to be. But it was not to Aline that he addressed half-whispered phrases implying admiration—not her glance which he sought to meet from across the room—not her hand that he ventured to hold with a lingering pressure, and twice to raise to his lips when no one saw.

On Phoebe's side, it was the old, old story of intoxicated vanity thirsting for more and more gratification, and the awakening of youth's passionate yearnings. The two emotions were like propelling oars to her little life-bark—something which she miscalled love deposed the weak conscience at the helm, and she refused to look at the rapids she was nearing.

One evening, Burton was especially assiduous in her attentions to Phoebe, lingering over the hair-arranging as if quite delighting in her task.

"There," said the young girl, growing a little tired of the operation, "I am sure that will do."

"I suppose it ought to, miss," replied the woman; "but really your hair is so thick, and so beautiful, that I could stand over it half the night."

"Oh! Burton, what a flatterer you are!" returned Phoebe, but by no means in a tone of displeasure.

"It is no flattery, Miss Phoebe—why should it be? And if I might be so bold as to tell, I know somebody who thinks just as I do."

"Burton, what is it you mean?" asked Phoebe, blushing to the very roots of the praised hair.

"Will you be sure not to get me into trouble by mentioning it if I tell? You see, miss, it would be different if your mamma were at home; then I might think it right to tell her; but I don't feel I have any call to talk about things to Mrs. Brindley."

"Certainly not; but what is it you have got to tell me? I promise not to repeat it."

"Well, miss, there is a gentleman, who shall be nameless, who said he'd give me—well, I

won't say what—if I would steal a lock of your beautiful hair for him. He thought I could do it without your knowledge—but I wouldn't, miss, be guilty of such a thing. As I told him, he ought to have asked you himself, open and candid ; but he said he hadn't the courage."

"Who was it, Burton ?—do tell me."

"Oh ! miss, you must know !"

"How can I know ?" said Phoebe, who wanted the truth explicitly stated.

"Well, to be sure, there must have been a many gentlemen admire you, and so, perhaps, you cannot be positive without I tell you. It was Mr. Rawlins."

"Mr. Rawlins !—why, when did you see him ?" cried Phoebe, with prompt and eager curiosity, not displeasure.

It has been said that liars should have good memories ; surely, for success in their undertakings, they need also the most absolute presence of mind. This circumstantial narrative about the lock of hair was a pure invention, but Burton had no fear of exposure. Cuthbert Rawlins was more in her power than she ever meant to be in his, and, she was assured, would

mightily approve of all she had done. There was an understanding between them, that she was to assist him in ingratiating himself with Phoebe by every means which presented itself; thus she had only carried out his wishes by this plausible story. And when Phoebe put the sudden question, "When did you see him?" Burton was still equal to the occasion, though it involved more invention. She took such morsels of truth as served her purpose, added the necessary "embroidery," and entirely suppressed the fact of Mr. Rawlins and herself having arranged periodical interviews.

"I met him coming out of church on Sunday," she said, "and he spoke to me to inquire after the family; and then he was going the same way, and he went on talking about you, and wanted me to be his friend. There, miss, now you know; but you won't tell on me, will you?"

"No, no, I won't tell; but I wonder Mr. Rawlins knew you," observed Phoebe.

"La, miss, you forget he was here best part of a week, when I nearly always waited upon him."

"To be sure I did forget that."

"And, miss, may I cut off a piece of your hair?"

"Certainly not, Burton," replied the young girl, but with a pleased smile on her face. "I could not think of such a thing as sending Mr. Rawlins a lock of my hair. But you did quite right to tell me—one ought always to know of such things, and, indeed, I feel quite obliged to you; you need not be afraid of my mentioning it. I am not a child now. There, now, good night. I am sure you must be tired standing over me for such a time."

Not a child! She had said it. That night when, for the first time, she was conscious of a secret and a mystery, when her drugged conscience slept, and so allowed her to feel a pride in much that ought to have been a shame—that night she laid down the innocence of childhood, with all its bright light-heartedness.

Before Mrs. Freeth returned to London, a system of clandestine correspondence between Cuthbert Rawlins and Phoebe had been established through Burton's agency. And, oh! the pity of it! The young girl fancied herself a

heroine of romance, instead of an adept learning quickly and cleverly lessons of deception and intrigue. The unprincipled waiting-maid was her confidant, and she made no other, Rawlins easily persuading her to secrecy, on the plea of his present unsettled position. There were passionate "love-letters," and a few stolen interviews, during the ensuing weeks; and though, when Rawlins entered on his course of surreptitious wooing, he had not intended exactly to compromise himself, he found before long that his own selfish inclinations were decidedly engaged. He was a clever, handsome scoundrel, but yet a human being, and though he began with hypocrisy, he ended by liking Phoebe Freeth better than any other girl in the world. She was handsome and clever, and her faults had nothing in them to repel him.

In the course of the Winter the ailing god-mother died, and the expectations in reference to Phoebe's inheritance were amply fulfilled. The will had been made within the last year or two; when Phoebe Freeth came of age she would be mistress of about twelve thousand pounds.

Meanwhile the testatrix desired that she should, at the age of eighteen, have the control of the interest of the money, and come into possession of certain valuables, notably plate, jewellery, and point-lace.

No wonder that Hester Otway found a girl burdened with a love-secret an unsteady pupil—and when the godmother died studies were still more neglected. By not very slow degrees Phoebe emancipated herself from the school-room, though she still took music and drawing lessons, and played at reading history. If her gradual but very decided assumption of independence was a little mourned over by her mother and Hester, it was laid entirely to the account of her legacy. Consequently the little “talking at,” which it must be admitted did occasionally take place, was all directed to abate “purse-pride,” and its kindred offences. Bees, I believe, can extract honey from even unwholesome flowers. Poor Phoebe in a manner reversed the process. From every little lecture she received she drew excuses for her own secret conduct. Did she not know in her heart that she was *not* worldly—that she was going

to be grandly generous and magnanimous with her money? To be sure, not exactly in the manner her parents and governess would approve, for already Cuthbert Rawlins was spoken of in the family with sorrow, and the "cold shoulder" turned towards him. The story of his grave misdoings had oozed out, and even Lionel could not defend him. But with a girl whose character was strongly veined with morbid sentimentality, who had always had a certain lawlessness in her nature, which lent attraction to forbidden things, and who was under the dominion of "first love," what she called his misfortunes only riveted her attachment.

Of course Cuthbert gave Phoebe his own version of his extravagances, his debts, and his gambling, classing all such affairs under the head of "follies." And of course he persuaded her that it was love for her which had awakened him to better things, and would inevitably keep him in the right path henceforth and for evermore. Perhaps there is always a sameness in the wooing of men of his class; protestations of this kind are so common that they might be

stereotyped as a warning to girls. I wonder at what age a woman must have arrived, or through what sorrows she must have passed, before she feels the full force of Lovelace's lines:

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more!"

With her conscience warped and blinded, Phoebe Freeth's mental and moral nature was growing all awry. She moved beneath a network of deception which became day by day more entangling, and, young as she was, even her beauty suffered. An indefinable expression came into her face; a look not wholly of cunning, not wholly of fixed determination, not wholly of watchfulness and caution—but a something made up of these attributes blended and moulded—a look which gives age to any face, but one that happily is not often found marring the bloom of "sweet seventeen."

CHAPTER XV.

A TRUE FRIEND.

Les discours sensés d'une femme de mérite sont plus propres à former un jeune homme que toute la pédantesque philosophie des livres.

ROUSSEAU.

THE shortest days were over ; Parliament had met, and the London season was beginning. Contact with society had a little reconciled Mrs. Freeth to the station in life to which she appeared to have been called. She was less shy and fearful now than she had been a year or two ago ; but still she did not take very kindly to the part her husband would have liked her to play. She was essentially the house-mother as well as the housewife, with deep affections compressed into narrow channels, and with the lines

of her character too firmly fixed for any change beyond that of development in the same direction to take place. If she visited with more ease and cheerfulness than she did in the early days of Hubert Freeth's prosperity, the motive power was still to please her husband and advance her children. She had not the restlessness and love of excitement which are almost necessary to make the woman of society in the present day enjoy her life.

Mr. Freeth had returned from the Continent with important work cut out. He was busier than ever—too busy to give much heed to trifling affairs, however closely they concerned him—only he stipulated for certain periodical hospitalities, at which of course he entertained his own set.

Reuben Appersley had talked of taking a house in town for the season, but Mr. and Mrs. Freeth had overruled the plan—pleading to have Catherine's society under their own roof, and urging, what was the truth, that Telford House was large enough for them all.

Reuben was now essentially a busy man. Though not a speaker in the House, he was

seldom absent from his place, and was already recognised by his party as a member that could be depended on. But there was a private interest which he pursued with avidity, and which took up quite as much of his time and thoughts as did his public duties. Ever since he had heard the incident of Hester's anonymous present, he had felt persuaded that George Otway was still alive, and it became a passion of his soul to track this man, believing it the only human means of clearing and vindicating his father's memory.

He spared not money; and perhaps through his liberality communicated some of his own energy to the "secret inquiry" people whom he employed. Certainly now there was some appearance of a clue having been found.

But with such several absorbing interests, there is no doubt that Catherine was a little neglected—not intentionally—not even in a manner that she felt as an unkindness. For he rested in the knowledge that she was in her father's house, among those dear ones of whom perhaps once he had been a little jealous; so he gave himself up to his chosen tasks, content

in a great measure to let his wife go her own way.

And Catherine's way was to "enjoy the good the gods provided" her. With a bright intellect, athirst for occupation and satisfaction ; a rapidly developed taste for the beautiful, and suggestive in the arts ; and with just that degree of sensuousness without which there cannot really be refinement, good society was to her a keen pleasure ! Alas ! I am afraid these are the very qualities which on the "wrong side of the tapestry" we call restlessness and love of excitement.

Because it gave Catherine so much pleasure to linger in picture galleries, and attend concerts, Mrs. Freeth was always ready to be her companion. She did herself enjoy music very much, but she shrank from telling how little her eyes served her. Still Catherine was to a great extent aware of the pathetic helplessness her mother's failing sight occasioned, and the knowledge made her infinitely tender and watchful, and eagerly anxious to be her companion as much as possible. Of course they visited together a great deal ; and notably became quite

habituées at Lady Hartrington's receptions.

Here they met Algernon Raybrooke, who was in the first instance profuse in his apologies for not having called at Telford House since his return to London. Apologies Mrs. Freeth accepted in simple good faith, especially as he took an early opportunity of atoning for his fault, if fault it were. By degrees almost imperceptible, and yet not properly to be called slow, Mr. Raybrooke, the "idle man," became the constant escort of Catherine and her mother; the whole arrangement appearing delightful to everyone concerned.

Algernon had the *entrée* to many studios, where he introduced his friends before the so-called private view days; and he always seemed able to procure reserved-seat tickets for attractive concerts, or good opera boxes for exceptionally crowded nights, when it was currently reported such things were not to be had for love or money. Then he was punctual in keeping appointments, and punctuality was a virtue Mrs. Freeth thoroughly appreciated; in unforeseen emergencies he was always full of resources, and was altogether so reliable as a human staff

to lean on, that Mrs. Freeth grew to regard him as quite the best liked of all her new friends. It was a liking based on that semi-maternal feeling which most middle-aged women feel when brought into close intimacy with the "next generation."

She delighted to listen to him and Catherine, though often quite aware that their conversation was "over her head." But realizing this fact only increased the pride she felt in her daughter, and helped to establish that reversal of position which latterly had taken place between them. Ever since her visit to Five Oaks, Mrs. Freeth had looked up to Catherine, for she had become vaguely conscious that there were heights and depths in her character which she had not yet sounded; and she was perhaps a little too apt to reverence faculties she did not comprehend.

Algernon Raybrooke was something more than polite in his civilities to Mrs. Freeth; he was thoughtful, considerate, and kind, in that quiet way which goes to the hearts of women. Her little commissions were never slurred over or forgotten, her tastes were remembered, her

wishes consulted ; no wonder that by degrees he grew to be one of the most intimate and frequent of guests. At least two days out of three he dropped in at luncheon, though always because he had something to tell or to plan—or there was some occasion for him to be escort to mother and daughter.

Phoebe, too, though not yet exactly considered “out,” was often of the party, but, unlike most girls of her age, she seemed marvellously indifferent to pleasure. A shrewd woman of the world would have been suspicious of this apathy in so young a girl ; but there was a simplicity of purity about Mrs. Freeth which made her very slow to think evil of anyone, and least of all of her own children.

Certainly Algernon Raybrooke might have known that they were drifting into a manner of life very likely to render them the observed of observers ; but a perilous enjoyment of the present blinded his judgment, while he relied on his own fixed determination, neither by word nor deed, to give the slightest occasion for the world’s censure.

One day he happened to call on Lady Hart-

rington, and—a rare occurrence—had the good fortune to find her alone. At first they talked of passing events of the day, but they were dear friends, this young man and old woman, and very soon the conversation turned to personal interests and pursuits. It is to be remembered that Lady Hartrington was the only person in the world who knew the secret of his heart, and though she would fain hope that his love for Catherine was a thing of the past, entirely stamped out, it was a keen sorrow to her whenever she recalled the sufferings she had witnessed. She wished from her heart that Algernon would fall in love with some one else and marry out of hand. And now there was something on her mind which she was determined to say.

“Algernon,” she exclaimed, “you have sometimes jestingly called yourself my son, adopting me for your mother—and now I am going to speak to you as if the relation were real.”

“Is it a scolding that I deserve?” he asked with a smile. “But believe this, that I am very grateful for the regard which prompts your words, whatever they may be.”

"Yes," resumed Lady Hartrington, "I am inclined to scold you, Algernon. You pay too much attention to Mrs. Reuben Appersley; the world is beginning to stare—its next step will be to talk."

"What does it dare to stare at? What would it dare to talk about?" he exclaimed, with strong emotion, for he was bitterly stung by the words which he had seemed so willing to hear; but Lady Hartrington was too true a friend to resent his impetuosity, and she answered, very calmly,

"The world is beginning to notice that you are ever by her side—as the phrase goes, her very shadow. The next thing will be for Mrs. Grundy to shake her head and begin to chatter."

"I wish Mrs. Grundy could really be personified," cried Algernon, his passion no whit abated; "I would take her by her long hair, and dash out her ridiculous brains."

"And I," said Lady Hartrington, with some sadness in her tone—"I would give her always the easy-chair by my fireside. See how we differ! I have the greatest respect for Mrs.

Grundy—the world could not do without her.”

“Oh! Lady Hartington!” he exclaimed, “you cannot guess the pain you have given me!”

“Yes, I can, and the knowledge is my pain. I fancy a humane surgeon, when he cuts or cauterises, *is* sorry for the pain he inflicts.”

“But you are mistaken—altogether mistaken,” resumed Algernon, in some degree mastering his feelings. “I am Mrs. Appersley’s loyal friend, and the friend of her family and her husband also. Such guard and watch have I kept over myself that I am certain no one suspects that I ever loved—her who is now a wife. Dear friend, give me some credit for conquering myself; I would die rather than be the means of tarnishing her name. The thought is horrible to me, knowing as I do her excellence—her spotless purity. But why—oh! why may I not have the solace of her friendship?”

“Because it is dangerous—in an inordinate degree. If you cultivated platronics with half a dozen other pretty and agreeable women, the case would be different.”

"Cultivate platonics with half a dozen other women! No, dear friend, I am not such a fool! My respect and regard for Mrs. Appersley are something quite exceptional."

"That is exactly what I dread the world thinking," said Lady Hartrington.

"What can the world find to say?" resumed Algernon. "Mrs. Freeth plays the *chaperon* as much as if her daughter were still single."

"But people consider Mrs. Freeth a singularly simple-minded and unworldly woman—not very well fitted to be *chaperon* in worldly society."

"And it is for those very qualities I love her. I vow to you, that motherly simple-hearted woman is to me charming. You forget, dear Lady Hartrington, that I spent a week under the same roof with her last Autumn, and that we have a right to consider ourselves intimate friends."

"I assure you no one objects to your attentions to Mrs. Appersley's mother."

"And there is another thing," exclaimed Raybrooke, "young as they are—mere boy and girl

—I do believe there is a *tendresse* between my brother and Jenny Freeth. If it develops much farther, I shall promote it with all my heart; then, I suppose, when the Freeths are a family connection, that odious Mrs. Grundy will hold her tongue.”

“That is a piece of news, I confess,” replied his hostess; “but sailors, you know, are proverbially fickle.”

“It is a hard proverb that says so; I think, on the contrary, they are as constant as other men, with more temptations to be faithless. But sailors have leisure to think and to feel, and the lonely watches, with the stars above and the waves beneath, must elevate any character that has an element of greatness in it. Frank is a fine fellow, and I thoroughly believe that little Jenny is worthy of him!”

“But she is such a child!”

“Between sixteen and seventeen, I fancy; she can afford to wait till Frank has a command. He never writes without mentioning the Freeths, and twice he has sent messages through me to the girl herself. Of course I delivered them, and marked the innocent plea-

sure they gave. Now, if Lieutenant Raybrooke should marry Jane Freeth, it would only be stretching the point a little if I called myself Mrs. Appersley's brother."

"And, meanwhile—during the years that Frank is waiting for promotion?"

"I cannot prevent the brotherly regard."

"Oh, Algernon, do you know your heart truly when you speak thus, and trust in your own strength?"

"I think I do. I know this, that Mrs. Appersley's esteem, friendship, companionship—call it what you will—is more to me than the love of any other woman could be."

"Hush, hush," interrupted Lady Hartington, "such words distress me beyond measure."

"Nay, hear me till you find some satisfaction in what I may say. Not having been able to win the only woman I ever did, could, or can love, it is not my intention to marry. Probably, if I live, by-and-by I shall travel a good deal—perhaps lead a life of adventure—perhaps write books, as adventurers sometimes do—trusting to Frank and his heirs to perpetuate the old family, and support the honour of the 'red hand.'"

"What! relinquish entirely your profession and give up Parliamentary ambition?"

"Yes; I have thought it all out. In the days when it seemed that I must work at the law, I hated the thought of having to defend the evil-doer; and now that I need not—indeed I will not. As for Parliament—well, I don't think it quite holy enough for one to wish to be its St. Stephen. I am not punning on St. Stephen's, I assure you."

"St. Stephen! What do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Hartington.

"Oh, then, you don't know that I was stoned at Fordinghill," replied Algernon.

"Indeed I did not."

"And Appersley, the successful candidate, saved me from further violence, and took me to his own home to be nursed. Oh, he is a fine fellow, in a great many respects."

"I did hear incidentally that you had been at his country place—and, under all the circumstances, it surprised me a little."

"And now, my dear lady, you have the explanation. And if any set of people want me to represent them in Parliament in the future,

they must go down on their knees for it, or, at any rate, bring me in without my lifting a finger to ask them."

"Which no constituency is likely to do, if you persist in burying your talents," said Lady Hartrington with a sigh. "I am afraid," she continued, "I must hide my diminished head, if all my prophecies about you are to come to nought."

"Dear, kind friend," said Algernon, taking her thin, wrinkled hand in his, and pressing it warmly before he raised it to his lips, "dear, kind friend, you have always thought too well of me—and cared for my best interests too much."

"The latter cannot be," she promptly replied; and she continued, "Oh, Algernon, do not disappoint the many friends who have loved you long and well."

. Algernon shrugged his shoulders slightly, but the gesture implied pain. After a little pause he said,

"What is it you would have me do?"

"Your own heart must tell you," replied Lady Hartrington; "yet, if you wish me to speak, let me advise you to begin the travels you talk about without delay."

"Well, after the season, and after Frank comes home next time, I will think about it. Meanwhile I must let things drift."

"That phrase is my pet aversion," said Lady Hartrington.

"Then I am sorry I used it," returned her guest. "I grant," he continued, "that letting things drift does often imply laziness and incompetence; but there are some people who never prosper with anything they themselves initiate."

"But I don't think you belong to that class. Take care that what you call drifting is drifting, and not placing a traitorous steersman at the helm. But I will say no more; I know you forgive the frankness of an old friend, who knew something of life before you were born. Now let us have the pipe of peace—will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Unfortunately I am engaged. I will tell you honestly where—at the Freeths'. It is a party of scientific old fogies—the uncle, the engineer, the great man of the family, is to be there—and the opportunity will be very desirable for enlarging my mind," he added with laugh-

ing irony. "To hear people talk on the special subjects which they thoroughly understand, is really, though, the pleasantest way I know of learning anything."

"I heartily agree with you," said his friend, "and I hope you will profit by the occasion, so as to distil some of the scientific lore for my womanly capacity when next we meet."

CHAPTER XVI.

UNCLE THOMAS.

I remember the days of old.

PSALMS cxliii., 5.

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.

PSALMS xxv., 6.

THE days were past when dinner-parties were a trial and a trouble to Mrs. Freeth. Indeed, they were so frequent now that she took them very much as a matter of course, and wondered a little, when she thought of her former perplexities and over-anxious cares, at the change which had taken place in herself. To be sure, she had long since obtained well-trained servants, and everybody knows how the *diner à la Russe* lightens and brightens the duties of a hostess. Then she had observed at other houses that fish

might be overdone, or the soup cold, or a sauce be spilt, and yet that the sky did not fall, or the earth open in consequence. So she had the good sense to try to glide into the way of life her husband desired, reconciling herself to it as much as she possibly could. For all of which she deserved a great deal more credit than she ever received, seeing how hard it is for those in middle life greatly to change their habits. Of course she was not a hostess who started conversation, or even kept it going ; but when Hubert Freeth entertained his friends, he always took care to have some good talkers at his table.

The visits of the old Uncle Thomas, the great man of the family, were so few and far between that they were always made the occasion of ceremony and festivity, and it was a select party of scientific celebrities, professors of various arts and sciences, many of them his own friends and associates, who had now been invited to meet him. Some of these old fogies, as Algernon Raybrooke had irreverently called them, had wives and some had not—so the balance of numbers was on the side of the male sex. Consequently Algernon had not any lady on his arm in

the pre-prandial procession, but found his place arranged between a be-plumed dowager and a black-coated individual with an order at his button-hole, and half the alphabet in initial capitals belonging to his name.

He tried to feel very glad that fate had not placed him next Catherine—he did not know that she had herself arranged the cards round the table—for though he had repudiated the idea of paying her undue attention, Lady Hartrington's words had in reality sunk deep into his mind. In the hours which had intervened, he had tortured himself a good deal with self-questioning, asking his conscience, his honour, in all seriousness, whither he was drifting, and beginning to suspect that the calm enjoyment of the last few weeks might, after all, have been a subtle snare. He had imagined rather than made several excellent resolutions. To be sure they were too contradictory to be carried out simultaneously. One purpose was to break off the intimacy with the Freeths by slow, almost imperceptible degrees; and another, to do it abruptly by going abroad at once. A third idea was to revoke his decision about the law, and

to take up his old studies again, and work at them with such fury that his mind should have no time for anything else; imitating Lionel—who, by all accounts, was rapidly making up for lost time at Cambridge. But Lionel Freeth, though by no means so fascinating a man in society as Algernon, had perhaps a tougher fibre of character, and a more resolute will.

Algernon tried to make himself agreeable to the Dowager on his right hand, and to profit by any sapient remarks from the learned lips on his left; but the scientific people talked very little “shop,” and the party fell into the pleasant grooves of lively rather than learned talk. Ordinarily, Algernon would have been quite in his element; but to-day there was a depressing weight at his heart which he could not shake off.

This is a mood, however, which has its compensations. Listeners in society generally observe more than talkers; and it might be that Algernon Raybrooke noticed and remembered the little events of that evening more accurately than the circumstances of many a pleasanter occasion. He had often heard the bachelor old

uncle mentioned incidentally, and felt a genuine interest in a man who had made a name and fame in the world; and as Uncle Thomas was in one of his most pleasant and genial moods, the impression he produced was very favourable.

The old man was above seventy, but carried his age bravely. His hair, which was very little thinned, was so purely white that it gave to his countenance the same expression as if it had been powdered, so that his eyes, which had really preserved their lustre to a surprising degree, looked keenly bright beneath the strongly-marked eyebrows, which still retained their ebon hue. Above the middle height, and erect of figure, there was something decidedly commanding in his presence; and perhaps the consciousness that he had achieved so many successes in life made him accept homage with a quiet dignity. He was a proud—a very proud man, who had lived for the world, and valued its opinion immensely; and now that he had reaped fame, and honours, and riches, it was commonly believed that every wish of his heart must be gratified; especially as his physical frame appeared still so exceptionably ro-

bust that years of life were probably before him ; while, with his nephew's sons and daughters to supply the place of lineal descendants, there did seem little in this world left unenjoyed for the wifeless, childless old man to desire. That he had remained unmarried was so evidently by choice that no one was inclined to pity the loneliness of his old age.

After the ladies left the dining-room, Reuben went off to the "House," and Algernon drew his chair nearer to Uncle Thomas, and had more personal conversation with him than had been possible during dinner. The result appeared to be a mutual liking between the old man and the young one. Altogether, it was in a pleasant mood that, half an hour later, the gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room.

Meanwhile, an addition to the party had quietly arrived. Mrs. Brindley and her daughter were sufficiently intimate with the Freeths to be treated without ceremony, and it was quite a common thing, when the number for dinner was made up, for them to come in for an hour or two in the evening, "just for a little music." They did so on this occasion, and the

party of ladies in the drawing-room was also increased by the two younger girls, Phoebe and Jane, and the governess, Hester Otway.

It chanced that Mrs. Brindley, in the act of examining some photographs, was seated just opposite the drawing-room door, while Aline, standing near, was chatting with Catherine in an animated manner, when old Mr. Freeth entered the room. Algernon had preceded him by a few minutes, and was admiring his venerable, dignified appearance, when a marked change came over the old man's countenance. Perhaps no one else in the room observed it, for the sudden paleness did not last; only when the natural colour returned to his cheeks, it seemed to have brought with it some lines of age that had not been remarked before.

At first Algernon thought the old man was ill, and half rose from the sofa, on which he was lounging, to offer assistance; but he soon altered his opinion, and felt persuaded some mental shock had been received. Soon afterwards, old Mr. Freeth was formally introduced to Mrs. Brindley and her daughter, to whom, on the occasion, he made a stately bow, but

hardly attempted conversation ; and when presently he helped himself to coffee, the cup trembled in his hand. Altogether, there was a collapse ; he was no longer the " old man eloquent " he had been a few minutes before.

Algernon may be pardoned for puzzling and speculating a little as to what it could have been that had happened. Nothing seemed to have occurred, and there were no strangers to the old man present except the widow and her daughter, who, indeed, because they so evidently were strangers to him, might be presumed incapable of disturbing him.

Mrs. Brindley looked a shade disappointed at his curtness, for she had long wished to see the famous old uncle, and would have liked to talk with him a little. There was, however, something too discouraging in his manner for her to address him again ; and yet she was interested in him, and looked at him from time to time with something very like a stare ; and, indeed, it happened that their eyes met more than once.

Later in the evening, however, a little circumstance occurred which made sufficient impression on Algernon's mind to be remembered

long afterwards. Uncle Thomas was not given to "petting," but if he had a favourite in the family, it was supposed to be Jane; therefore, there was nothing strange in his beckoning to her to take a chair next him. Algernon was sitting near, listening abstractedly to Catherine's playing of a "song without words," instead of hovering about the piano, to turn the leaves, as assuredly he would have done a week ago. So placed, he could not help hearing, though at first with but divided attention, the conversation between the old man and his great-niece. After a little ordinary chat, Algernon's ear caught the remark,

"I did not quite catch that lady's name—will you tell me who she is?"

"Mrs. Brindley," replied Jane. "I wonder, uncle," she continued, "that you have never seen her before—she is quite an intimate friend—indeed, Phoebe calls her 'Mamma Brindley' sometimes."

"Really! But I think I have heard your father mention the name, though I never chanced to meet the lady till now. You know I do not go to evening parties; and when I have dined

here before, there have seldom been ladies. This gaiety is quite an exception."

"Oh! uncle, I wish you came oftener, so as to know all our friends," replied Jane, with a genuine sincerity in her tone, to which the undemonstrative old man was not quite insensible.

"Are you sure I should like to know them all?" he said, with a smile.

"But you need only know well those you liked best. Why, even I cannot like everybody."

"I am glad to hear it. But to return to your friend, Mrs. Brindley. Did you ever happen to hear what her maiden name was?"

"I think I have seen it in an old music-book," replied the girl; "though I forget it just now. I fancy it begins with a K. But I do believe the old book I am thinking of is here. There is a quantity of Aline's music mixed up with ours. I'll go and look."

Now Algernon perfectly remembered the old music-book to which Jenny alluded, and had noticed the name, Susan Karvill, written therein more than once. He felt interested enough to

be glad that it was forthcoming, as he saw Jane carrying it across the room.

Perhaps few inanimate objects are so potent in recalling the past as an old music-book, where, without system or much order, ballads which have had their day, and dance-music no less obsolete, are bound up with a few classical compositions of perennial freshness, for the sake of which perhaps the old book has been allowed a prolonged lease of existence.

The old man laid the book across his knees, and took up the cue which Catherine—now risen from the piano—innocently gave, that he was looking out something he wished played. So he turned over the yellowed leaves of "She wore a wreath of roses," "Oh! no, we never mention her," and half a dozen other songs of the same class, old sets of quadrilles, and early waltzes of Strauss, till he stopped at "Rousseau's Dream," which he asked Catherine to play. He had ascertained all he wanted to know; and passing comments on the old music, almost chased away the recollection from Jane's mind of why the book had been sought.

"Aline Brindley sings old ballads so well,"

said Jane, continuing the conversation begun.

"Do you know 'Auld Robin Gray,' uncle? And would you like me to ask her to sing it?"

"As you like, my dear. Your young friend seems a very charming young lady."

"She is indeed. And don't you think her very pretty?"

"Very."

"I am so glad you think so," replied Jane, with glee, "because opinions differ. Now, I admire her so much that it pleases me to think I am right. She seems to me so perfectly unlike other people, so much handsomer, to my taste, than anyone I ever saw, that I don't even compare her with other people. Did you, uncle, ever see anyone at all like her?"

"Not for many a long year."

"She is not in the least like Mrs. Brindley, is she?"

"Not in the least."

And then the accidents of the evening broke off the little *tête-à-tête*; but Aline sang "Auld Robin Gray," soon after which Uncle Thomas inquired if his carriage had arrived, and being answered in the affirmative, pleaded that he had

been up late for many nights, and was the first to take leave.

But when the old man reached his home, he did not at once seek rest. He ordered a light in his study, but told his servants not to sit up. Then he opened a drawer which had not been unlocked for years, and took from it a sealed packet some eight inches square. His fingers broke the seals, but with unsteady touch, and then rested on a dark morocco-case. Not for more than a quarter of a century had he touched the spring by which it opened, but he pressed it now without pause or flinching. When the lid flew open, it revealed a fine painting on ivory, the half-length portrait of a very lovely woman; but it looked like Aline Brindley herself, costumed in a by-gone fashion.

When Thomas Freeth had last looked at that miniature he had needed no assisting glass to reveal its delicate traceries, and at first he thought the image blurred and faded; but, peering at it again through his double eye-glass, he saw how little time had touched it.

"Yes," he murmured to himself—"yes, the grand-daughter is her very self returned to

youthful bloom and beauty, while the daughter is as much the image of the cruel tyrant-husband !”

CHAPTER XVII.

A MATRIMONIAL TETE-A-TETE.

Think that the Future asserts itself through
Each act you determine,—each work that you do.

CHARLES SWAIN.

“AND how did the evening go off after I left?” said Reuben Appersley, as he was taking his solitary breakfast an hour or two later than the rest of the family, Catherine, however, presiding to minister to his wants.

“Oh! the girls sang, and I played, and we all talked. I don’t know that there is anything else to tell,” replied Catherine, “except that we were not late, for uncle broke up the party by leaving early, and the remaining guests soon followed.”

"Quite right too!" cried Reuben, with emphasis. "The late hours of London life are perfectly killing, and everyone who sets a better example is a public benefactor. I only wish I could—very soon I would."

"I have often wondered, dear Reuben, that you bear the change of habits so well," replied his wife.

"But I hate it none the less," he continued. "One must have sleep, but these morning slumbers make me ashamed of myself. Here am I breakfasting at eleven o'clock! Why, at Five Oaks I should have been up for hours, and very likely had a seven miles' ride by this time." And as he spoke Reuben cracked an egg with such unnecessary violence that half of it was wasted.

"I think," said Catherine, with a smile, "we have all been working desperately hard this London season—we women at what is called pleasure, and you and papa at business; and I think we are all growing pale and thin, and a trifle cross in consequence."

"Nay, Kate, I have not found you cross, whatever other people may have been," replied

Reuben, with a hearty, loving warmth which went straight to her heart; and he continued, "But I did think you looking far from well yesterday; perhaps you were tired, for you look better this morning."

"Oh! I feel pretty well," replied his wife.

"Still you are thinner," said Reuben, "and I should like to see a little more pink in your cheeks. Now do get back the roses, Kitty, before the Drawing Room day, for, as we have been persuaded into this assumption of dignity, I should like you to look your best when you are presented."

"I almost wish I had not allowed myself to be persuaded," returned Catherine; "the dear Queen has not a more loyal and loving subject than I am, and there is not a hand in the world I should so much like to kiss as hers. Yet, for all that, I feel in going to 'Court' a little like only a half-welcome guest. Royalty must be infinitely bored by the press and push of people desiring to be received—people of a class that a few years ago—from all I hear—would never have dreamed of seeking such a distinction."

"At any rate," said her husband, "as your

father's daughter, and my wife, *you* have every right to the honour."

"Well, in that sense, certainly. And, now that it is all arranged with friends, and my dress ordered, I must go through with it; but I shall feel very lonely. At the same time, I think mamma was quite right to give up the idea for herself; the fatigue and excitement would have been too much for her."

"Why is it that Miss Brindley's presentation is put off?" asked Reuben.

"Apparently because Aline has so strong a disinclination to its taking place at present. I never knew her so firm as she has been on the subject—she who generally yields to her mother in everything. I have my own idea about her motives, but I hardly like to breathe it, even to you."

"Oh, but tell me—out with it."

"Remember, then, that it is only my opinion, and that I really have very little to go upon; and yet I do think that latterly, since Aline has been so much admired, Mrs. Brindley has become extravagantly ambitious for her daughter."

"Certainly she is a very pretty girl—and I used to fancy Lionel thought so. Indeed, I consider the mother rather made up to him. Surely she would think Lionel a sufficiently good match."

"I don't know, I am sure. Li used to be a great favourite, but I think she has cooled towards him lately. Phoebe brings me a good deal of gossip; she is at the Brindleys' so much, and she says there is some rich man, with a title, who has got introduced to them lately, and who, it appears, was fascinated by seeing Aline at the Opera. Now we all know that Mrs. Brindley has very little of what is called sentiment, but she does dearly love money, or rather all the good things which money will buy."

"But surely she would not sell her daughter to a man she did not like?" said Reuben, with some indignation.

"She would be shocked at such an insinuation," replied Catherine; "but prudence, as she sometimes reminds us, is one of the cardinal virtues. Her prudence, however, is a very expansive affair, like a large cloak, I sometimes fancy, worn over ugly things."

"But I think the girl likes Lionel," returned Reuben, "as well as that he admires her; though, if she can be persuaded to give him up for money or rank, he has a lucky escape from marrying her, that is all."

"If there really be an attachment," said Catherine, "I do not think Lionel need fear. From what I have observed lately, I think Aline is one of those rarely fine characters who, out of gentleness and kindness of nature, will sacrifice to others all manner of trifling wishes and pleasures; but in matters of principle, or where the affections are concerned, can be firm as a rock. I am very fond of Aline, and should like her for a sister."

"You are a good champion for her, at any rate," replied the husband, "though some people would say Lionel might do better."

"That's a horrid way of looking at it."

"I only said 'some people,' my darling, not that I so looked at it. But, after all, we are only speculating on what may be mere moonshine."

"Just so. And I think it will be time enough for poor Li to think of marrying when he is

called to the Bar, and when he has paid his debts. It was very good of you, Reuben, to tell him to pay everyone else before he paid you."

"Only right, I think. But I forgot to tell you he is going to send me a hundred pounds next week."

"Oh! I am so glad," exclaimed Catherine. "Not on account of the money, but because it is a sign that he is getting out of debt. It is a shame that Mr. Rawlins has not paid you himself, since I know the money was borrowed for his use, and to meet his extravagances."

"Rawlins is little better than a regular black-leg," replied Reuben, with warmth. "I suppose Otway was much such another."

"I hope not, for Hester's sake," said Catherine.

"I daresay Hester takes after her mother. I have no quarrel with the women of that family. Indeed, I always pitied the poor wife, and I cannot help liking Miss Otway. I assure you I have tried to see faults in her," he added, with a little emphasis in the confession.

"Rather hard upon poor Hester," said Catherine.

rine, after a moment's pause—perhaps she remembered that little tale she had heard about Reuben's passing admiration of Hester years ago—"and yet a great triumph for her to hold her own against your prejudice. I wonder if she ever will hear anything more of her father?"

"I think she will, and before very long; but, Kitty, you must not tell I say so. I am particularly warned to keep all we hear close."

"Then you have gained some information about him?"

"I believe so. If we are on the right scent, we know the name by which for twenty years he has passed, and we know the emissary he employed to bring the money to his daughter."

"You mean the elderly woman, who so interested Aline Brindley?" said Catherine.

"I do. There's a mystery about her, too—but I cannot see that we have much to do with that. She leads a perfectly harmless life, and has the appearance of a decayed gentlewoman—pays her way, but has no acquaintances—has a few letters now and then; generally they bear the Melbourne post-mark; but lately she had

one from Natal—and in a hand-writing that used to come from Australia.”

“And do they watch for her letters, poor thing!” exclaimed Catherine, with indignant scorn. “Reuben, I wish you had nothing to do with these secret inquiry people and their dirty work. It is not like you to use such tools, and I am sure no good will come of it.”

“Don’t suppose I like the work, I hate it. But it is perfectly lawful, and even necessary. Why do you say no good will come of it?”

“Because I have an instinct that says so.”

“That’s just like a woman—women always put instinct above reason. Now my reason tells me that truth will come of it. And that is the very good I am seeking.”

“I hope from my heart, dear Reuben, that you may be right, and I wrong,” said the wife. “I know that I often have strong opinions, which I cannot easily argue about.”

“And that is just what vexes me sometimes. I am sure, Kitty, I am never so pleased as when we think alike; and when we do not, if you could only convince me I am wrong, I would give way directly.”

"I would rather, when we differ, be convinced by you at any time," replied Catherine. "But I admit that feelings and instincts are unmanageable, and generally refuse to be convinced of anything against their showing. But I will try to express in words what I feel about this Otway affair, if you like."

"I wish you would."

"I feel that when for twenty years God has allowed a mystery of this kind to remain unsolved, it acquires a sort of sacredness, as if He had had pity on the transgression, and was willing to consign it to oblivion."

"And yet we are told that the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed ultimately."

"Yes, at the Day of Judgment; but then I believe we shall be so horrified at seeing ourselves as we really are that we shall not have eyes for the sins of others."

"I suppose that is the orthodox way of looking at things," said Reuben. "But still as long as we are in this world I think we have a right to bring every sort of truth to light. Now, I want the truth about my poor father established once for all, and to do this I would willingly pay

Otway's debts for him, if need be. But I don't believe there is need for this. If my information is correct, he has made a heap of money in the gold fields, and has already paid off some of his liabilities."

"I am glad of this, if only for Hester's sake. But still I wish the story of his absconding were not being raked up. The present generation knows nothing about him, and there are some things which it seems but charity to let the moss of forgetfulness gather about. However, no doubt you know best."

"Whether I do or not," said Reuben, "I have gone too far to recede."

"Then I will say no more," returned the wife, "though I did wish you to know what I felt."

"I think I will order my horse and have a gallop in the Park. I seem to want fresh air to clear my brain."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DRAWING-ROOM DAY.

Let not the cooings of the world allure thee ;
Which of her lovers ever found her true ?

YOUNG.

IT was a Drawing-room day, and the different sections of London society concerned in that momentous circumstance were astir betimes. Great ladies, accustomed to the life of Courts from their youth upwards, perhaps feel no bounding of pulse on such occasions ; yet even they are sometimes critical, and anxious about feathers and lace, and for half an hour wrathful with that dilatory Madame X—, who never will send home a dress till the wearer is waiting to don it. Yet it does arrive just in time, and is so lovely that Madame X— is forgiven, with

only a warning about "another time," a warning which she takes with a smile, as if it were a plenary indulgence. And the greatest of great ladies cares for her diamonds, and has them brushed and burnished, and laid for hours in the sunshine, if she knows what the *savants* say—that diamonds absorb light and give back the radiance they have harboured.

Very young girls again, shielded by the maternal wing, and with nerves unjaded, and too inexperienced of life to be very much frightened at anything, often bear themselves bravely through the ordeal of their "presentation." But novices of the class to which Catherine belonged, generally feel an excitement and feverish anxiety about the event, which are a decided counterpoise to the honour and pleasure experienced. It is very well to take the necessary regulation lessons in the management of a long train, and the execution of the Court curtsey, but few women who have encountered it deny the trial of nerve it is when they have for the first time to acquit themselves before Royalty and a host of critical observers. Nay, the mere physical fatigue that is undergone on

these occasions is something appalling, except to the very robust, and latterly Catherine could not be said quite to belong to that class.

But besides the wearers of Court dresses and the milliners who will drive everything off to the last, and are rattling about in cabs with their baskets and boxes all the morning, there is an intermediate class, who take delight in looking on and admiring, or criticising the appearance of their friends. Aline Brindley had persuaded her mother to put off their presentation for another year, but there was no reason why they should not gain a little knowledge of routine and etiquette by means of Mrs. Reuben Appersley's experience. Accordingly it had been arranged that Mrs. Brindley and her daughter were to "come and see her dressed," and await her return to hear all circumstances minutely detailed.

But when the appointed time arrived, no Mrs. Brindley and Aline appeared; upon which default Phœbe offered—begged, indeed, to be allowed—to go and fetch them. The distance to their home was so short that she often did visit

them alone, and no objection was made to this proposal. But Phoebe was a long time absent ; a longer time indeed than could quite truthfully have been accounted for, by even the state of affairs which she found at Mrs. Brindley's residence ; and when she did return she only brought with her Aline, who had barely five minutes of time allowed her in which to examine the various lovely fabrics which made up Catherine's Court dress. Reuben had made this the occasion of completing his wife's suite of diamonds, by giving her a tiara which even in the broad daylight flashed brilliantly amid her dark hair. In truth diamonds and rare soft lace, and the Court plumes, became Catherine admirably, seeming in perfect harmony with her style of beauty. There are women who look the worse the more richly they are clothed, but Catherine was one who "carried off dress ;" and as Reuben helped her into the carriage, he had the grace to let her know how proud he felt of his wife.

Catherine smiled her pleasure that he was satisfied with her appearance ; but sometimes she wished he would look deeper, and more

often find something else than her beauty to praise. A great fault on her part was this discontent. To cease to admire the face and form of the beloved, is the first outward token of love's decay. True love finds something admirable in the most homely features; true love is "sick unto death" when it sees the object of its regard only as others see it, and it would have been wiser of Catherine to rejoice that her husband still thought her so fair.

There was a mystery which even Aline had not solved that prevented her mother going to Telford House that day. Londoners, with their ten postal deliveries per day, are always liable to the plague of unwelcome letters, and, just as Mrs. Brindley was preparing to start, she received a communication which moved her deeply, although she would not divulge to her daughter what her tribulation was.

"My dear," she replied, in answer to Aline's attempt at soothing, "it is from a person you never heard mentioned—a person I thought dead long ago. Don't question me, or I shall be angry. Surely I am not obliged to tell you everything."

"Oh! mamma, I never thought of such a thing," exclaimed Aline, hurt at the implied censure, "but it grieves me to see you in trouble, and to be so powerless to comfort you."

"You cannot comfort me; but, if you wish to please me, leave me alone, and go to the Freeths and make my apologies. I cannot accompany you; I have something else to do."

"What shall I say?" asked the daughter, with a slight sigh, but desiring to be meekly obedient.

"Say I am not well—I am sure it is quite true."

"They will be so sorry, and will let me come home soon, I know," returned Aline.

"That is just what I do not require. You can stay as long as you like, and you can tell me everything about Mrs. Appersley's dress, and how she looks, and that will do just as well as my seeing her. What I chiefly want to know is how much the whole affair costs."

"But, dear mamma, I cannot ask any questions of that sort!"

"Of course you cannot, in a rude, indelicate way, though, if you keep your wits about you,

something may ooze out. However, it is of no consequence; I should not mind asking Mrs. Freeth, and she would tell me, I know. But, really, I cannot think about Mrs. Appersley just now. I certainly am glad we were not going to be presented to-day, that's all."

Of course this conversation caused some delay, and when Aline withdrew to write two or three needful little notes, preparatory to keeping her appointment with the Freeths, she fell into a reverie, out of which she was startled by the striking of the clock. The notes had to be written in haste, and they were scarcely finished when Phoebe Freeth was announced.

"I will not keep you three minutes," said Aline. "It is inexcusable in me to have brought you out to fetch me."

"Oh! it was a pleasant little walk," said Phoebe; "but really we have no time to lose. I was to tell you the carriage was ordered half an hour earlier than we said yesterday."

"Ah! had I known this, I really would have been punctual," replied Aline. "You will be sorry to hear that mamma cannot come with

us. I was to say she does not feel well enough."

"Oh! what a pity!"

But, by this time, Aline had arranged her hat, and buttoned her gloves, and in a few minutes the two girls were threading briskly the three or four streets which alone intervened between the two residences, and were, as we know, just in time to see Catherine in all her splendour.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brindley was occupied in a very different manner. Though not a crying woman generally, she shed some bitter tears in the solitude of her own room, as she looked out from her wardrobe the soberest-looking and least remarkable gown she could find, for which she exchanged the rather pretty and very fashionable morning-dress she had on. Then she selected the dowdiest bonnet of her stock, and a black silk mantle, and thus equipped came downstairs, and passed hastily out of the house, merely saying to the housemaid. "It is uncertain when I shall be home."

At the first stand she got into a cab, and told the driver to take her to a certain obscure street, situated near the New Road. There

was very little of the philosopher about Mrs. Brindley, but just now her mind was preternaturally strained, and she was sensitive to influences that at a happier moment would not in the least have affected her. As the cab moved along at a drawling pace she felt she was passing into a new world. She had come into a district not only of mean houses, but of the mean shops which are always to be found in such a neighbourhood. Small chandlers' shops, where dried fish hung side by side with tallow candles. Coal and coke merchants' warehouses, with small sacks of the fuel protruding on the pavement. Butchers' shops, where shreds of meat, rather than joints, looked carrion-like; and bakers' windows, where loaves were seen but dimly through dirty panes. But most mournful of all were the pawnbrokers' shops, with second-hand raiments hanging near the doors, flapping in the soft breeze, and suggesting all sorts of painful histories. The workman's jacket and the neat cotton dress—the thin tawdry finery and the warm rabbit-skin tippet.

Dirty children with tangled, unkempt hair played in the street, and a little girl, momentarily

absorbed by the fascinations of a rag doll, was specially noticed by Mrs. Brindley, because the cabman pulled up sharply to prevent his wheels going over her. The lady even moralized to herself about the love of dolls and the wonderful workings of the maternal instinct, coming round to a full recognition of the enormity of a woman who could neglect or desert her offspring.

Presently the cab turned into a street decidedly less squalid, a street inhabited probably by the patrons of the mean shop-keepers. She had not given any number, so the man drew up at his will, and Mrs. Brindley alighted and discharged the vehicle. She walked half way down the street before she arrived at the house she was seeking, and realized something of the character of the locality. Three houses she passed bore intimations that apartments were to be let. One dwelling proclaimed its occupant a dressmaker, and at the next door a day-school was established. Under all the circumstances of the case Mrs. Brindley was really to be pitied, for the ordeal which she was now enduring had not been brought about by any fault of her own.

With a tolerably steady hand she knocked at the door of a house that was a trifle more pretentious than the others, inasmuch as the windows looked brighter and the door-steps cleaner.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. BRINDLEY DISCOVERS THAT GOLD IS HEAVY.

The story of a real life fairly lived out is
God's best teaching.

CHALLICE.

A GIRL in a pinafore—the landlady's daughter, who ran on errands and waited upon the lodgers—opened the door, and for answer to Mrs. Brindley's inquiry if Mrs. Kar lived there, ushered her across the door-mat into a little front parlour. The room was empty, but Mrs. Brindley heard the patter of the girl's feet along the passage, and knew it was her voice that spoke to some one in the back room, saying,

“Here's a lady as wants you, Mrs. Kar.”

It might have been about five minutes that Mrs.

Brindley was kept waiting, but the time seemed longer. She surveyed to a very surfeit of observation the common worn carpet, the faded curtains, the dim, old-fashioned chimney-glass which reflected a cracked vase of paper flowers, and the chipped drops which at irregular intervals hung round a pair of ancient lustres. There was a horse-hair sofa opposite a stuffed chair, that by a stretch of courtesy might be called easy. A pembroke table was the centre ornament of the room, and was draped with a perfectly fresh table-cover, so out of keeping with the shabbiness of its surroundings that it looked what it was, the private property of the "lodger." An open work-box, of the style of forty years ago, with faded blue satin lining, but with hinges and locks as true as ever, seemed by its weight to keep the table-cover steady, and to tell of feminine industry in the little parlour.

Mrs. Brindley had seated herself with her back to the window, so that she faced the folding-doors by which the two parlours communicated, and through which the person she had come to visit in due time entered.

Mrs. Kar was on the border land between

what is called "elderly" and "old"—that is to say, sixty years of age fully rung out. Slight and fair still, a physiognomist could not doubt that she had once been a very lovely woman; but there came fitfully to her countenance such a deepening of its habitually mournful expression, that tender-hearted people had been known to question her in apprehension of some present pressing trouble. As she paused for a moment in the doorway, she looked more like a picture in its frame than a living woman. The curtains of a little bed made a drapery and shade at her back, while a sort of half light from the front window streamed upon her. Very pale she was, and her lips trembled for a moment before she uttered a word. Of course Mrs. Brindley had risen, but she also stood for a moment motionless. Then the elder woman moved forward a step, stretched out both hands with a gesture of deprecation, and exclaimed,

"Susan!"

"Is it true that you are my mother?" cried Mrs. Brindley, in that hard tone which makes words rattle like stones.

"Susan!" It seemed the only word that as

yet Mrs. Kar could utter ; but now she advanced into the room, and dropping into a chair, burst into a passion of tears.

"I suppose it must be so," resumed Mrs. Brindley, her tone a little less flinty ; "but your letter was a great surprise."

"No doubt you thought me dead," sobbed the other.

"Of course I did. Indeed, my husband led me to believe so long years ago."

"He! why, I wrote to him many times!"

"You wrote to Major Brindley?"

"Yes, imploring for news of my child."

"He never told me. But I am sure he acted for the best."

"Ah! you think so. But it was a little cruel."

"I do not say it *was* for the best!" exclaimed Mrs. Brindley. "I only say he thought so. He was a good, kind husband to me, and I do not like to hear him blamed."

"And because you remember him thus, never again will I speak the blame. I will try not even to think it."

There was a little pause, broken by Mrs. Brind-

ley. Being a woman whose true sphere was a world of pettiness, the contemplation of great passions, the exhibition of strong emotions, always disturbed her as if through a sense of injury, and, like all people of her class, she hated what she called a scene. [N.B.—Small natures never play the *prima donna's* part in a "scene."]

"It is altogether very painful," said Mrs. Brindley. "I really wish I knew what to say or do."

The hostess sighed audibly.

"I am sure you must know what a surprise your letter was," continued Mrs. Brindley. "And as you seemed anxious to see me I thought I would come at once. But how can we feel other than as strangers! You know I can have no recollections. I was in my cradle when you——"

Yet even Mrs. Brindley had not quite the nerve to finish the sentence.

"When I left my home," said the other, "my husband and my child. True—dreadfully true, but I have learned to face the truth these many long years."

"Well, then; what is it you expect from me?"

I am afraid you are in want, and I assure you my income is very small."

"Be at rest on that point. I have sufficient for my needs. Till I was assured of a provision, I refrained from approaching you."

"Then what is it you want?" asked Mrs. Brindley, in a voice so softened from her first manner that it sounded by comparison like one of sympathy.

"A little human love and kind compassion," said Mrs. Kar, again burying her face in her hands.

"I am sure I wish I knew what to say or do," repeated Mrs. Brindley, drawing her chair nearer to the elder woman, and even touching her arm with a gesture that was intended for soothing. Now that she knew money help was not wanted, the daughterly part was not quite so hard to play. "I am sure I wish I knew how to comfort you," she continued. "After all, it is certain you have suffered."

"Suffered!"

"I am sorry if I hurt you by saying so," exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, who was really startled

by the emphasis with which the word had been repeated.

"You did not hurt me—it was the right word, only you can never know how much I have suffered. I do not even wish that you should."

"But you are not very old," returned the visitor, really trying hard to say and do what seemed to her cold nature to be kind and discreet—"you are not yet very old, and as you tell me you have plenty of money, I don't see why you should not make yourself comfortable, though I think you have chosen your residence in a miserable neighbourhood."

"The neighbourhood suits a person who, before all things, desires obscurity. Susan, whatever you know of your mother's history, you must have heard only from those who scorned and hated her with unpitied wrath. Can you bear to hear it from her own lips?"

"Yes, I think it would be well for me to know everything."

"So be it. Yet I will make the tale as brief as I can, and speak as little ill of your father as need be. I was a portionless girl, married at

eighteen to a man of reputed wealth. I was dutiful, and obeyed the relations who had brought me up, being myself altogether innocent of love and life. They meant well, I can see that now, and were themselves misled. They thought the leopard could change his spots—in other words, that a *roué* in middle age would reform and make a good husband. Bitter was my awakening as fold by fold my horrible life seemed to unwind before me. Even during the brief space when I was treated with the fondness the new toy called forth—the fondness was fitful, capricious, and selfish, nothing to which a young heart could respond with grateful love and trust. But, oh! when the evil days set in, bearing on their strong tide cold contempt and bitter insult, brutal acts and harsh tyranny, the world seemed changed to a vast pandemonium, from which there was no escape. In those days people in general were less pitiful towards a wife's troubles than I think they are now. Marital separations always more or less branded the woman; and divorces, though not impossible, were rare and costly. Oh! my trials were very great!"

"Yes," observed Mrs. Brindley, "every one admitted you had a bad husband; and it was a dreadful thing for me not to be able to respect even my father."

"Very dreadful—to be soul-orphaned, as I consider you were," said the hapless mother; "so dreadful that, had I realised the truth, your little life would have saved me from my sin. But I was young and inexperienced, and had had but slight moral and religious training, wherefore an unholy attachment gained the mastery. Surely I do not gloss anything, or extenuate over-much? I was tempted and I fell—I have been a great sinner."

"It is a shocking story; but I do pity you—indeed I do," sighed Mrs. Brindley.

"Bear with me to the end; and be sure of this, I will not call foul things fair. In my great ignorance of law, and the realities of life, I thought I should be able to hide my child, consequently I planned to take you away; but the nurse whom I had trusted to bring you to the rendezvous betrayed me. If betrayed is too harsh a word, let me say she deceived me, and broke her promises. At any rate the irrevoca-

ble step was taken before I realised that I had deserted my child. I grieved, I wept, I called myself heart-broken—the brand of shame even seemed then not so dreadful as the loss of my child, but it is necessary to remember that I was under the influence of a great, strong passion, and its guilty pleadings stifled in some measure the cries of duty. But there are sinners and sinners—at least to me it seems so; and at the close of my career I am able to thank God that He turned aside all the specious tempting baits, and paid me in His own just wages. Of course I did not feel this gratitude in early days. I pined for love and peace, which never could be mine, as if I had deserved them, and slowly found out for myself that in guilt there could be no joy.

“My husband had dissipated the greater part of his fortune, but he was still rich enough to carry a divorce-bill through the House of Lords, as I and another person hoped he would do. Alas! for our expectations, Mr. Karvill’s own life had been so evil that the usual redress for his injury was denied him.

“Need I tell you how, by sure degrees, the

life I had entered on became simply intolerable ? Mine was not the common story of seduction and desertion. He never cast me off. But as the real hard facts of social life opened out to me, and God's immutable laws of right and wrong imprinted themselves on my heart, one thing became apparent beyond all else—happiness was not for me ; but if peace could ever be found, it must be by listening to the voice of conscience, so lately wakened up. I tore myself away from him who had led me astray, strengthened in my resolve by the knowledge that the life of guilty mystery we were leading—for the world at large never knew the real name of my companion—was in reality sapping his mental powers, and ruining his prospects in life. We neither of us belonged to the class who can live peacefully in shame. We had slipped out of the straight path, but were not of the accustomed travellers in the thorny cross roads yet.

“ Sometimes we talked of our position almost as if we were discoursing of other persons, but always with the same result—the wrench must proceed from me. Finally, I decided to go to

Australia. I was intellectually what is called well educated, and was quite competent to be a governess in the colonies. *He* paid for my passage, and at our tearful parting forced some money upon me. I assumed the half of my name, and the new life began.

“It would take a volume to narrate the strange people I encountered, and the half-adventurous life I led. Years passed on ; I was earning my living, and, busily useful in many ways, I had less and less time for painful memories. It is true that I hid the dark half of my history, even as I hid the half of my name ; but the evil days came, when some one or other recognised me, and bruited my story. My character—false character, if you like to call it—stood so high that, if I had resolutely denied the accusation, I should have been implicitly believed ; but I did not load my conscience with the fresh guilt of a falsehood. In bitter anguish I pleaded that in my new life I had striven to do my duty, and with even some indignation repudiated the idea that I could have contaminated the young—I who had been watchful with the keen watchfulness of

knowledge over the first buddings of evil, to nip and blight them at once. But it was the way of the world to call my good conduct hypocrisy.

“I had saved a few pounds, so was not at once destitute; but my little store of money soon dwindled, even though I eked out my means by needlework. But I think a woman should have blameless and happy memories to ply the needle for a length of time contentedly. I know the mere mechanical employment nearly maddened me. I fell ill with a low, nervous fever, during which there were many days of unconsciousness and delirium. I might have died, I think, but for the skill and kindness of the doctor, who attended me without fee or reward.

“When I was sufficiently recovered to discuss plans for the future, Mr. Oldham, the doctor, startled me by the proposal that I should become his housekeeper. Not that there was anything incongruous in the arrangement, for I was ten years older than he, and looked even much more than my age. I gladly accepted the offer, and entered upon my new duties as soon as

my strength permitted. This was an important epoch in my life. My employer, master, friend—I hardly know which to call him—contrary to the usual custom of medical men, made many changes of domicile, but I was always willing to attend him. He was a skilful practitioner, and wherever he settled for a time, found patients. I, too, learned to dispense drugs, and picked up some elementary knowledge. The day came when my benefactor sickened for an illness which he knew would run its alarming course. We were in a remote place at the time, far removed from all help; but he had just the power to instruct me what to do under all possible coming contingencies, and I had strength and understanding given me to carry out his directions. When, after days with regard to which his memory was a blank, consciousness returned, he declared that we were quits now; for if, under God's Providence, he had once saved my life, I now had saved his.

“Hardly was Mr. Oldham recovered when there came to me the news of my husband's death—old news, that had taken a year to

reach me ; and almost simultaneously I received a communication from the object of my early guilty passion, offering to give me the protection of his name, declaring his readiness to make me his wife. Oh ! Susan, the temptation was great—the trial supreme !”

“And why did you not accept his only reparation ?” exclaimed Mrs. Brindley, in unfeigned astonishment.

“For reasons that my inmost soul spoke loudly. Youth and beauty, which once he had prized, were no longer mine ; and I was conscious of having lost something of my early refinement. How could it have been otherwise, under the circumstances I have described ! I should only have been to him a bitter disappointment and daily reproach, and I preferred remaining to him a chastened memory. But I think I may add that some less selfish motives strengthened my refusal. He had risen to fame and influence in the world ; marriage with me would have set tongues talking, and have tarnished his name to a certain degree.”

“Well, I must say I think you made a great mistake,” exclaimed Mrs. Brindley ; “a middle-

aged man in a good position can do pretty much as he likes with regard to marrying, and, even if he had suffered a little, it would have been no more than he deserved."

"Ah!" sighed the other, "you cannot see things as I saw them. I had been forced to bear the brand; I knew its smart, though I had grown used to suffering. Nothing of personal joyousness remained for me; my best satisfaction was serving and sacrificing myself for others."

"Well, if you feel it so, nothing more is to be said; though, for my part, I should have thought the protection of a husband very desirable."

"Once I, too, should have thought so; but that time was past. However, I must hurry on with the details of my life. Mr. Oldham speculated, made much money in consequence of the gold discoveries, and I participated in the gains. I kept accounts for him, and was often nurse to his patients. I can satisfy my conscience that what I possess I have earned—save, indeed, that I once accepted a handful of gold from a dying man, who told me that my three days of gentle

nursing was all the kindness he had known since his mother blessed him on her death-bed. In her name and for her sake, he implored me to take it without scruple."

"And how long have you been in England?" asked Mrs. Brindley, a little abruptly.

"Ah! that I must not exactly tell you. I came to England on a confidential errand, for which again I have been fairly—not extravagantly—paid. It is pleasant to remember that I am trusted most by those who know me best."

"You seem to me to have been a blessing to some people," observed Mrs. Brindley; "and the recollection of this ought to comfort you—mother!"

The word—the one word the poor frail woman had pined to hear—was uttered at last, and in her emotion she grasped her daughter's hand and leaned forward for a kiss.

"Bless you for that word!" she exclaimed; "and it emboldens me to say what is near my heart. Do not be alarmed; I know very well that, for your sake, our relationship must be concealed—but let me know your daughter.

Surely it would be a true thing to call me a poor relation—a relation you had thought dead till to-day?"

"Of course that would be possible," replied Mrs. Brindley, after a slight pause—"that is, if you are very much bent upon it; but don't you think it would be painful for everybody?"

"I would try to bear all the pain," murmured Mrs. Kar.

"With the best intention in the world, I don't see how you could," sighed Mrs. Brindley. "Aline is very quick and clear-seeing, and would be sure to wonder she had never heard of such a relation."

Mrs. Kar sighed audibly.

"I don't know how to manage," continued Mrs. Brindley. "I am sure, from everything you say, you would be very sorry to blight Aline's prospects, or to injure her in any way."

"Injure her!" exclaimed Mrs. Kar. "I have seen my grand-daughter, and it is no figure of speech to say that I would die for her."

"You have seen her!" cried Mrs. Brindley, in astonishment. "Oh! tell me, when and where?"

"I cannot, because the declaration that you ask would betray the secret of another."

"How strange that is!"

"Yes, it is strange, like so many of the coincidences in my sad life. But be under no apprehension; it was but once I saw her, and then only as an obscure individual. It is most unlikely that I made the slightest impression on her mind."

"Did she hear your name?" inquired Mrs. Brindley.

"No; I was a nameless stranger that, for a moment, crossed her path, now nearly a year ago."

"And you have been thus long in England?"

"Yes, on the confidential business to which I alluded. Till quite recently, I considered myself pledged to the utmost privacy and secrecy."

"I am sure I wish I knew what to do for the best," mused Mrs. Brindley.

"Think it over, Susan, and come and see me again. Meanwhile, I want to give you something, if you will accept a present from me."

So saying, Mrs. Kar withdrew for a few

minutes; but returned, carrying a small but evidently heavy box, which she placed on a chair and unlocked. It was a box with a tray, and the first compartment was filled with those odds and ends of womanly belongings which are generally designated rubbish. Old gloves and faded ribbons, torn lace and yellowish muslin, antiquated patterns and scraps for patchwork, were the articles which first displayed themselves. But, before Mrs. Kar lifted the tray of "rubbish," she took the precaution of locking both the doors of the little parlour.

"My landlady is deaf," observed Mrs. Kar, "or I should have feared to talk so freely. But her eyes are of the sharpest, and though she has seen the lid open as you see it now, I think she is puzzled a little at the weight of the box—a weight which I propose a little to relieve."

So saying, she removed the tray; her next proceeding being to lift out divers little bags and parcels, several of which she emptied into her lap.

"You perceive," sighed Mrs. Kar, "I am not so very poor as at first you feared. These nuggets of gold would stand between me and want

for many day. But I hope I may never need them, for a certain sum of money has been lately sunk as a life-annuity for me, and my income, as I told you before, is sufficient for my wants. Do take what you like, and have it made into jewelry for your daughter."

Mrs. Brindley only half concealed her astonishment. She was not used to seeing lumps of gold poured into a lady's lap, and passed through the fingers as if they were so many ordinary playthings. She instinctively made a rough calculation of the value of what was before her, and estimated that there was at least two or three hundred pounds worth of gold, from which she was asked to take what she liked.

"I am sure, mother," she exclaimed—"I am sure you are very kind and generous. It is what I never could have expected, and I do feel quite grateful. It would be very nice for Aline to have a handsome brooch and ear-rings made, and I really am in want of a new chain myself."

"Oh! take plenty—and for a rich bracelet besides. The best way will be to let the jewel-

ler pay himself with gold, and then the ornaments will cost you nothing. Only there is a little nugget here naturally very nearly in the shape of a heart. I should like my granddaughter to keep it just as it is. It is weak of me, perhaps, to care for such a thing, but I do."

"And so she shall. Oh! I must tell her something about you. How else can I account for all this treasure?"

The look of pain which made her countenance so very sad passed over the elder woman's face. But she had for long years accepted suffering as her portion, and it was but a momentarily fiercer heat of the furnace in which she was being tried, if she thought that her "nuggets" were to be the golden keys to open out her heart's desire. In truth this erring woman had learnt the last and most difficult lesson of Christian love—fully and freely to forgive, as she herself hoped to be forgiven. She rebuked her own jealous thought, made large allowance for her daughter's first indecision, and even thanked her warmly for the promise she implied.

"At all events, you will come and see me

again soon?" she cried, as, at last, Mrs. Brindley prepared to take leave.

"Oh! yes; and if I can be a comfort, and of use, I will. Thank you again and again for your present. But, dear me, what a weight it is! Luckily I know my pockets are strong, and I shall take a cab at the first stand. Oh! don't cry, pray don't."

"It does me good—indeed it does. But I will try to be calm, if my tears pain you."

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Better the feet slip than the tongue.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IN the opening scene of the last act of Shakespeare's greatest love drama, there is a wondrous touch of truth, one of his lightning flashes, that show for a moment the heights and depths of his psychical experience. With all the coils of the great woe, the great mistake, ready to enthrall him, Romeo exclaims exultingly,

"My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne."

And there are few of us, I think, who do not know how often a feeling of more than common serenity is made the prelude to change and

turmoil, momentous events, or deep sorrows. Is it that the lull is given that strength may be gathered up ready to meet the coming strain or shock ?

Mrs. Reuben Appersley's presentation had gone off charmingly, and though she was very sensible of bodily fatigue, as she drove home from the Palace, she was pleased and satisfied in no common degree. I have altogether failed in depicting Catherine, if I have not made it apparent that she was keenly alive to the enjoyment of everything that was beautiful in nature and art; and, let cynics say what they will, there is a potent spell exercised by the panoply of a Court. To be fair among the fairest of a bevy of beautiful, gorgeously-attired women, bent on homage to the loftiest Lady in the land, the very Queen of Queens in the world's history, is surely something to cause a little self-complacency, all the more harmless for being self-recognized! Catherine had no vanity, she was too earnest, had not froth enough in her nature to be vain, but she knew her own qualities, and could measure them justly, leaving her own heart full of reverence for all that seemed above

her reach. She was singularly content just now. That the great event had passed off without *contretemps* of any sort, was not only a natural satisfaction, and most agreeable recollection, but a fact that would give intense pleasure to all her family; and she pictured to herself her father's quiet smile, her mother's eager interrogations, and her husband's honest pride and delight. After all, perhaps they were right in desiring her to be presented. If her husband went to the Levee, why not she to the Drawing Room? Perhaps her condemnation of middle-class ambition was a mistake; at any rate, she no longer regretted the step she had taken. Doubtless it would have its advantages many ways.

It was in this pleasant, satisfied mood that Catherine drove home; but hardly had she alighted from the carriage when she perceived that there was some trouble in the house. In the first place, instead of a man-servant, it was "doll's face" that opened the door, and the girl looked grave as she said,

"Missis bid me to tell you, ma'am, that little Miss Lucy is ill, and she can't leave her; and I

was to ask you on no account to go near the room, for it is most likely a 'fectious fever, she says, though there's no knowing till the doctor comes. Parkins is gone after him now."

"Oh! can't I see mamma?" exclaimed Catherine. "She said this morning the child had a feverish cold. I hope my little sister is not seriously ill. I can soon take off this finery, and then I might be of some use."

"Missis told me, ma'am, most particularly," continued the girl, "that I was to beg of you not to be anxious, and that I was to see that a cup of tea was ready for you; and she thought I had better set it in the library, where you would be sure to be quiet. She knew you would be tired, and said you ought to have it directly."

"Well, I suppose I shall please mamma best by doing as she wishes; and it is true that I am dreadfully tired," said Catherine, entering the library as she spoke. "But please to tell her that I hope she will see me as soon as the doctor has been. I shall be glad to have some tea; but when I ring it will be for my maid. I shall be thankful to take off my train."

At this moment there was a knock at the street-door, which now was opened by Burton, and the voice that inquired if Mrs. Freeth was at home was that of Mr. Raybrooke.

Yes, Mrs. Freeth was at home, but unable to see visitors, Burton explaining the sad reason.

"I am indeed sorry!" exclaimed Algernon; and his sonorous tone penetrated to the library, the door of which was ajar—"very, very sorry," he continued, drawing a card from its case; "but perhaps Mrs. Appersley will see me—is she at home?"

"I'll take your name, sir," replied the woman, who, having small faith in "coincidences," was perfectly sure the visitor knew Mrs. Appersley had returned home; so short a time was it since she entered the house, that probably he had seen her alight from the carriage.

"You may mention," added Raybrooke, "that I should be very glad to see one of the ladies, if convenient, having something to say."

"Ask Mr. Raybrooke to come into the library," said Catherine, raising her voice a little, so that her words were heard by the visitor.

Gladly obedient to such an invitation, he advanced, and in a moment they shook hands with smiles of kindly greeting.

Catherine, in the bloom of her young womanhood, a trifle flushed it might be by the excitement of the day, was handsome enough to look radiant under that great trial, full-dress by daylight. It is true the sunlight was tempered by Venetian blinds, which made just that *demi-jour* in which the diamonds round her throat and in her hair scintillated with a dazzling lustre. But still the light was garish enough to be a severe ordeal.

Algernon had seen too many women of fashion in their court dresses to be in the slightest degree awed by any of the customary paraphernalia, and yet he did not easily restrain an exclamation of admiration as he looked at Catherine. Quite natural was it to talk a little of the events of the day, which they were discussing with some animation when Burton came into the room with a message of apology from Mrs. Freeth—which, however, relieved anxiety concerning Lucy, as the doctor's report was favourable—and a renewed reminder about the tea.

"I believe dear mamma is half afraid I shall die of starvation some day," said Catherine, with a smile; "she is always so anxious about me. But to-day she is quite right, for I am very tired. Do you ever take afternoon tea?—may I help you to a cup?" she continued, preparing to pour out the tea as she spoke.

"Let me do all this," said Algernon, "and wait upon you, as is becoming. It is a pity for you to destroy the *pose* of a queen, or ruffle those waves of silk which take three chairs to support them," and suiting the action to the word, he twirled the library-table so that the tray came round to his side. "Ah!" he continued, "you smile at me for undertaking such a feminine office."

"Nay," exclaimed Catherine, "I am only very grateful for being helped and waited on."

"You are very gracious; but it is I who am grateful for being permitted to serve. In the old Troubadour days it would have been on bended knee."

"Ah!" interrupted Catherine, gaily, "but in the old Troubadour days there was no five o'clock tea to be handed; which small fact

prevents my regretting them very much. Thanks—you really are quite an accomplished tea-maker.”

“The bachelor’s necessity has made me so, then,” returned Raybrooke, with the faintest possible sigh. “When a man has made tea for himself a hundred times, he does grow accomplished in the art. Besides, I rather despise people with coarse palates, who cannot tell good things from bad—don’t you?”

“I hardly know—I have not thought on the subject. Perhaps in some respects they are to be envied.”

“Not always, I think, for sometimes the obtuseness runs through the nature. The most refined, cultivated, and generous-hearted people I know, condescend to consider the requirements of the table, though, of course, with a happy moderation. For instance, there is Lady Hartrington, you know, what charming dinners she gives.”

The words were spoken, and surely they seemed harmless enough; but the next moment Algernon would have given much to recall them. All the incidents of that dinner, when

he and Catherine first met, had flashed upon his mind even before the words were uttered; but now the memory seemed a burning anguish. He had thought himself so self-sustained, so self-controlled, that he could toy with danger; but this *tête-à-tête* with Catherine—a privilege he had never before for a moment known—seemed suddenly to have become perilous and bewildering. She had no prompt answer to his commonplace remark, and Algernon saw that her cup slightly shook in her hand, while a faint flush that appeared, when it faded, left her cheek paler than before. He was assured that she, too, remembered with singular distinctness that fateful day, and his man's heart bounded with a wild, unreasoning triumph. Yet it was but a few moments before Catherine said,

“Yes, Lady Hartrington is in all respects the most charming hostess in the world.”

“And the warmest, truest friend!” cried Raybrooke. “What a happy man Sir Jasper must be to have been forty years married to such a woman!”

“Married forty years!” exclaimed Catherine.

"Yes, she told me so the other day, and expatiated on the delight of married people growing old together. I think she feels as sure of a re-union beyond the grave as—as—well, as she does of their concord lasting till death. But I shall grow absurdly romantic, if I talk longer of Lady Hartrington; and, do you know, I called here to-day with a purpose—yes, the purpose of taking a great liberty."

"That is something difficult for me to realise," said Catherine, with a sort of courteous dignity. "I am persuaded that what you call a liberty is some sort of great kindness."

"I mean it as a kindness, believe me, and I think it is something more—a duty. Briefly let me say what prompted my visit to-day. During the last few months Mrs. Freeth has paid me the high honour of treating me as a friend, speaking of many things in which she was deeply interested. I know that Mr. Rawlins is no longer welcomed here, and I feel that I should tell what I have seen without delay—your sister is so young, so inexperienced," and, with a natural hesitation, Algernon paused a moment.

"My sister—which sister?" exclaimed Catherine. "Oh! Mr. Raybrooke, what is it you know—what is it you have seen?"

"Simply this: To-day, only a few hours ago, I witnessed a street meeting between your sister Phoebe and Mr. Rawlins. I saw them saunter up and down a quiet street in close and earnest conversation, and too much absorbed in each other to notice me. It is true I took some pains to escape observation."

"Phoebe!—Mr. Rawlins!" cried Catherine—"this morning! Ah! I remember she did go out alone; but surely she is to be trusted. Oh! Mr. Raybrooke, are you certain there is no mistake?"

"Quite certain," said Algernon, gravely. "You see now the liberty I have taken in interfering with so delicate an affair."

"Rather the good deed you have done," returned Catherine warmly. "Painful as the incident is, we must be infinitely obliged to you for making it known. He must be a thoroughly bad man to take advantage of a young girl's ignorance—for I cannot believe that Phoebe is aware of the impropriety of her conduct. The

acquaintance must be broken off at all hazards ; but oh ! I am stricken with shame and sorrow ;" and fairly overcome by her feelings, she burst into tears.

" Ah ! this is what I dreaded," exclaimed Algernon ; " but it seemed to me wiser and kinder to tell mother or sister than to mix up men with such a story."

" Much—much," replied Catherine.

" Then you acquit me of being a busy-body ?"

" Pray do not so miscall yourself—though, for my own part, I think there are many more sins of negligence and indifference committed in the world than of undue interference in the concerns of others. I can fancy that three-fourths of our acquaintances, seeing what you saw, would only have shaken their heads, and shrugged their shoulders—never have had the moral courage to take the step you have done. If my sister is to be saved from an unhappy entanglement, you will have been the means."

" She is so young !" said Algernon ; " I hope she will only be pitied, not blamed."

" I am sure I pity her from the depths of my heart !" replied Catherine ; " for Phoebe's posi-

tion is peculiar. I wonder," she continued, as if from the impulse of a sudden thought, "I wonder if Mr. Rawlins ever heard that Phœbe is independent of her family."

"Is it so?" exclaimed Algernon with surprise.

"Yes, her godmother left her a fortune; but I do not see how Mr. Rawlins can know it."

"Depend upon it he does, and that he is a deeper-dyed villain than I thought. Horse-whips were made purposely for such shoulders as his." And Algernon spoke with only half repressed wrath.

"Oh, we will hope not. Phœbe is thought pretty, and he may really admire her. But it is mean beyond measure to seek her in this clandestine manner."

"I heartily agree with you; but a gambler has no honour, it is one of the earliest stakes he loses."

"Oh, I too detest gambling."

"Of course you do, or you would not be yourself. I maintain that gambling—and there is gambling of a worse sort than with cards and dice—is more demoralizing even than drunkenness."

"More?"

"Yes, by many degrees. I say so, much as I abhor intemperance. One class of drunkards lose themselves, poor wretches, in their endeavours either to drown care, or to prop up the failing energies of an overtaxed system; and the other and yet more guilty ones, at any rate, have companions who share their false and fleeting enjoyment; nay, they are often led into their besetting sin by their genial qualities and convivial tastes. But the gambler is a heartless, selfish demon, whose gain is another's loss, whose joy is bought by another's woe. Oh, Mrs. Appersley, your sister must be saved from any entanglement with Cuthbert Rawlins."

"Mamma must be told, I fear, and yet she is in such trouble just now about Lucy's illness! Oh, it is all too sad. I wonder if I could influence Phoebe. I think I will try. Papa is out of town, and my husband is at the House—there is something special, for which he wants to vote—and I have but you to advise me. Of course I shall not mention your name to my sister."

"As you please, but for her sake I think it

would be better not. Poor child, she would perhaps feel pained to know I saw her. Ah, I am young in years to be a Mentor, but I often feel old—I suppose I have so exhausted life.”

“You exhausted life!” cried Catherine, in unfeigned astonishment.

“There are days and hours when I feel utterly hopeless, and I am afraid that to-day I am in one of my dark moods. Pray forgive the egotism of bad spirits.”

“You hopeless! Oh, Mr. Raybrooke, you should always come to your friends when what you call a dark mood is on you. Low spirits are often fostered by solitude and inaction. I have sometimes thought that the small troubles of life melt away like snow in the sunshine when we talk them over with a friend.”

“Ah,” sighed Raybrooke, “the small troubles, and even the troubles which are not small—like the one which brought me here to-day—may be lightened and dissipated by discussion, as long as there is something to be done. While the battle of life is raging each soldier hopes for victory. But there are cases in which the colours seem struck, and nothing is worth

striving after. But why on earth do I talk in this way to you?"

Ah! why indeed! unless to prove, for the millionth time, how dangerous it is to skirt precipices, and to skate on thin ice, though the precipices be but forbidden subjects, and the thin ice words that veil more than they express. Ah, why did he linger, now that the object of his visit was achieved? why yield to the fascination of the hour, as Catherine, in her regal beauty, sat before him? It was so sweet, so very sweet, to talk with her in confidence thus. Surely his worship was the worship of the moth for the star. For worlds he would not have had her know that it was his loitering, with the hope of seeing her for one flashing moment only, that led to his discovering Phoebe's indiscretion. But, with the ferment of dangerous thoughts in his mind, he still kept true to his best intentions; and, in answer to some really commonplace deprecation from Catherine, he rose to go.

"Forgive me this once," he exclaimed, "and I will try never again to distress you with my bear's growl at life. Do you know I am thinking of going abroad for an indefinite time

—half a dozen years perhaps. All round the world—North Pole—South Pole—Polynesian Islands—somewhere or other, perhaps, I shall shake the black dog off my shoulders.”

“All round the world! half a dozen years!” exclaimed Catherine, who had risen from her chair. “Oh, how many friends will miss you!”

“Will they? But for all that I shall go. What if I say good-bye to you now.”

He held out his hand, and their eyes met. In the look there was neither guilt nor shame, but each one read the secret of the other's heart. And the writing of it was that mournfullest phrase, “Too late.”

The next minute, overcome by bodily exhaustion and mental strain, Catherine fainted. The seizure was so sudden that she would have fallen had not Algernon caught her in his arms and drawn her to a sofa. He called loudly for help, but even as he did so he weakly yielded to the sudden strong temptation which assailed him—and kissed her forehead. That he repented the next moment did not undo the fault. Then he rang the bell violently, a summons answered with wonderful promptness by Burton.

Indeed the woman was in the room before he heard her step; he was little aware that the door had been ajar, and she a listener during the greater part of his visit.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





